GEMS OF



KASHMIRI LITERATURE

T.N. KAUL

Kashmiri literature of the last six hundred years abounds in literary gems such as the immortal *Gulrez*, the Sufi poetry of Nund Rishi, the evocative poems of Mirza Arif and Mahjoor, the delectable, erotic love poems of Habba Khatoon and Arnimal and the epigrammatic Retsh Ded. Most of Kashmiri poetry, with its subtle undertones, is written by mystics, as this representative anthology underscores.

Apart from superb selections from 23 Kashmiri poets this volume includes six short stories by various authors, and an essay. A short introduction on the life and work of the litterateur concerned precedes the presentation of his or her work. The poetry section constitutes nearly two-thirds of the volume, reflecting the pre-eminent place of poetry in Kashmiri literary heritage. The original Kashmiri version is rendered in Roman script and its English translation presented on the opposite page. The stories voicing the concerns and convictions of Kashmiris, as also Kashmiri humour, represent a slice of Kashmiriyat.

Also included in this book are some rare masterpieces not so far projected to the English-speaking readers. The volume, unlike the few anthologies published earlier, covers the whole literary gamut of Kashmir from the fourteenth century to the present time — in one place. Much care has gone into making this work representative of Kashmiri literature in every sense of the term.

The author has used a specially devised simple phonetic script for the original poems for the benefit of the younger generation of Kashmiris settled far away from their motherland. It will come as a boon to those not in touch with their native tongue by encouraging them to learn it and thereby enable them to retain their cultural roots.

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4. A HISTORY OF INDIAN LITERATURE (Vol. VIII), Sahitya Akademi, 1990 (Co-ed.)
5. - 7. MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE: AN ANTHOLOGY, in three volumes, Sahitya Akademi, 1992, 1993, 1994 (Co-ed.)

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T.N. KAUL

Foreword by Dr. Karan Singh



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FOREWORD

Kashmir has been the land of mystics, philosophers and scholars of high repute. Most of its ancient literature was written in Sanskrit or Sharada script. Literature in Kashmiri is a comparatively recent phenomenon which covers the last six hundred years. During this period, several significant works have enriched Kashmiri language and literature. Shri T.N. Kaul's selections from these works in English translation will be useful for lovers of literature in India and abroad.

Translation of literary works is a complex exercise. While it is possible to translate prose to a higher degree of satisfaction, it is more difficult to translate poetry, as the translator seldom has the same experience and creative talent which the poet represents in the original work. In case the poet is a mystic, the translator's job becomes even more difficult, as he or she will have to raise their level of experience to be able to do justice to the task. Most of Kashmiri poetry is written by mystics and has subtle undertones of deeper meaning.

The section on poetry constitutes nearly two-thirds of this volume and reflects the pre-eminent place of poetry in Kashmiri literature. We have the *vaakh* of the great mystic Lalleshwari (14th century A.D.), the first known poetess of Kashmir. Her *vaakh* descended down the centuries through time-tested traditions in a culture where her philosophy had a meaning and message for the people. It is just over the past century that her *vaakh* have been compiled and made available in print to readers. The poetry of *lol* which took its roots in Lalleshwari's time was further enriched by Nund Rishi, who was her contemporary, and Queen Habba

Khatun, in whose time *lol* poetry reached its zenith. Let us remember that Lalleshwari and Habba Khatun's verses have a deep message for the people of Kashmir in these traumatic times.

We also get a sample of Mahmud Gami's work in this volume. Ghazals and *masnavis* were introduced by him into Kashmiri literature early in the nineteenth century. His poetry reflects the unique religious fabric of the Valley, which was secular in the real sense. The ghazals of Rasul Mir (d. 1870) and Wahab Khar (1842-1912) are an integral part of this culture. Works of contemporary ghazal writers Amin Kamil and Rahman Rahi also find a place in this volume. References are also made to various other forms of Kashmiri poetry which include *vatsun* of Arnimal and Rasul Mir, *rov* songs of Mahmud Gami and Sufiana ghazals and lyrics of Wahab Khar, which occupy an important position in Kashmir's culture and literature.

Lilas (devotional songs) sung by the Pandits have also taken due place in Kashmiri poetry. In this volume there are selections from Prakash Ram, Krishna Razdan and Parmanand. Their *lilas* became part of the Bhakti Movement which took shape in Kashmir in the first half of the nineteenth century.

As Wordsworth is to English literature, Mahjoor is to Kashmiri literature. His lyrics highlight the value of beauty in nature rising far above the divisions in society. His message to his people in his poem 'Mazhabi Ittihad' is most relevant today. We find how concerned he was about the future of Kashmir and the welfare of its people. Kashmiri poetry was given a new dimension by Dina Nath Nadim who introduced blank verse, sonnets and wrote poetry for opera. Though Nadim Sahib is no more, his contribution will be remembered in the years to come. Maqbool Kralawari's *Gulrez*, his *magnum opus*, marks the beginning of this anthology. He has been an outstanding pillar of Kashmiri poetry.

Selections from 23 Kashmiri poets enrich this volume which also includes six short stories and an essay by various authors. I congratulate Shri T.N. Kaul for undertaking this useful work with devotion and dedication.

Karan Singh

KARAN SINGH
Ex-Sadr-e-Riyasat
Jammu and Kashmir

1 November 1995

PREFACE

It was my life's ambition to project masterpieces of Kashmiri literature to the outside world. With the completion of this anthology I feel happy at my inner sense of satisfaction. My four-decade labour of love in the cause of my mother-tongue had paid off already in the shape of numerous translations and writings on the culture and literary landscape of Kashmir which appeared from time to time in different books and periodicals.

Gillian Wright, noted translator of Hindi novels, says in a recent article in *The Times of India*: "Literary translation remains mainly a labour of love. That labour can be immensely satisfying. The satisfaction comes from delight in the original and belief in the author's worth. Translation attracts an appreciative readership, even if small. Like magic, it reveals things which would otherwise be invisible. And it gives the joy of discovery and understanding."

In January 1995 I mailed to my friends and readers a synopsis of Kashmiri literature with annotations. This novel idea of a self-profile inspired me when, due to the turmoil in Kashmir, I lost contact with the litterateurs residing in the Valley — and those forced to migrate to other parts of India — for whom I had worked for over a decade after my retirement from *The Times of India* on completion of a hectic journalistic career of 34 years. I felt it was my duty to send a documented record of English renderings of poems, short stories and essays to interested people who would not otherwise know when and where these were published. There was a tremendous response from all lovers of

literature, including the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao. All this served as a boost to continue my work on the remaining projects even at this late stage of my life, when I am already over seventy.

Some of my friends, however, suggested in their messages of good wishes that I put together in one volume what in my judgement constitutes the best of Kashmiri literature. I took their valuable advice seriously and the result is before you.

Included in this book are not only translations culled from my earlier published works but also some rare masterpieces not so far projected to the English-speaking readers. The volume, unlike the few anthologies published earlier, covers the whole literary period of Kashmir from the 14th century to the present time — in one place. I have selected gems from 23 poets, six short story writers and one essayist and also provided detailed write-ups on their life and work.

The first chapter uncovers the immortal romance, *Gulrez*, written in 1849 A.D. by Pir Maqbool Shah Kralawari (1802-1877). It will be proper to describe this exquisite *masnavi* as his *magnum opus*. No effort was made so far to transcreate the 60-odd couplets constituting its climax and deftly delineating the intense yearning and anguish ever suffered by a Kashmiri woman. I have given this poem, translated by me after a hard sustained effort, the pride of place for its sheer excellence. It is a unique and rare sentimental experience, not to be found in any other poetic work. Every stanza is studded with simile, metaphor, symbol and allegory.

The recent desecration and burning down of the 600-year-old venerated shrine of Sheikh Nooruddin Wali, patron saint of Kashmiri Sufism, also called Nund Rishi, at Charar-e-Sharief by Pakistan-backed foreign fundamentalist mercenaries, was a horrendous act which injured the psyche of the people of the State, both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The *dargah*, a masterpiece of Kashmiri architecture, represented the most shining example of the age-old composite Sufi culture of Kashmiris, also described as *Kashmiriyat*. I have quoted several instances of this culture from the writings of Lal Ded, Nund Rishi, Mahmud Gami, Aziz Darvesh and others. It was Lal Ded who had said in one of her *vaakh*: "Do not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims." Nund Rishi referred to the Muslim shepherd who is said to have followed Lord Shiva up the Harmukh mountain and attained *moksha* there and then.

Mahmud Gami also mentioned the abode of Shiva in some of his poems. The following verse of his draws a vivid picture of the Lord:

Silver sheen of Your forehead
and the sabre ever on it
and the serpent on the treasure;
Come to me.

All Sufi and mystic poets believed in the oneness of mankind and sang of the unison between different religious thoughts, their goal being the same. The elevation of Khwaja Habib of the 16th century from the earthy level to ethereal heights is noteworthy in this context. Only a Sufi poet could make such a bold experiment. A striking example of the faith in Hindu-Muslim unity can be found in Nathji's letter to his elder brother in the short story entitled 'Roots', written by A.K. Rahbar.

Kralawari's 'Noshe Lab', Habba Khatoon and Arnimal all delved in love themes, especially separation from their dear ones. Lal Ded and Habba Khatoon, both had a taste of ill-treatment by their in-laws while in the case of Noshe Lab it was her mother who played the villain. The great Bhakti poets Parmanand, Prakash Ram and Krishna Joo Razdan, in their *lilas*, fervently praised Shiva, Rama and Krishna all alike. Master Zinda Kaul sang of "eternal

longing". In the modern period, Retsh Ded, deeply shaken by the loss of her husband in the prime of her youth, gives vent to her agony in the shape of *vaakh* (verses). Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor sings of the idyllic natural beauty of Kashmir and its glorious past and highlights the cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims. Arjan Dev Majboor's heart is bruised by the recent happenings and he yearns for the return of normalcy in the State. Ghulam Nabi Firaq has a dig at the so-called elite in his excellent poem 'Eilaan'.

All translations are my own, except a few which have been duly acknowledged. The pioneer of translation work from Kashmiri, the late Prof. Jayalal Kaul, can hardly be excelled and I feel happy to use his delectable renderings of Lal Ded and Arnimal. Actually, he has always led my path like a beacon and been a source of inspiration to me in continuing the great work started by him. I also thank Prof. S.L. Sadhu and Shri Shantiveer Kaul for their transcreations, which have enhanced the worth of this book.

I have used a specially devised simple phonetic script for the original poems for the benefit of the younger generation of Kashmiris settled far away from their motherland. This script might also facilitate the work of printing by practically eliminating the diacritical marks. It will come as a boon to those not in touch with their native tongue by encouraging them to learn the same and thereby be enabled to retain their cultural roots.

I must record here my deep gratitude to revered Dr Karan Singh for kindly having spared time, in spite of his busy schedule, to write an illuminating Foreword to this book.

Last but not the least, I am deeply grateful to Shri T.N. Kaul, former Foreign Secretary and a proud son of Kashmir, and Shri Inder Malhotra, my friend and mentor, for giving me the idea of this anthology. Kaul Sahib rendered invaluable guidance and support in the completion of my project.

I also take this opportunity to pray for peace to the soul of my sister, Smt. Prabhavati Dhar, who was originally responsible for initiating me into literary pursuits. Her anguish was no less than that of Habba Khatoon and Arnimal and recitation of the lamentations of Noshe Lab had become part and parcel of her daily routine.

T.N. KAUL

Kalpana Kunj
15-16/A Malkaganj
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September 15, 1995

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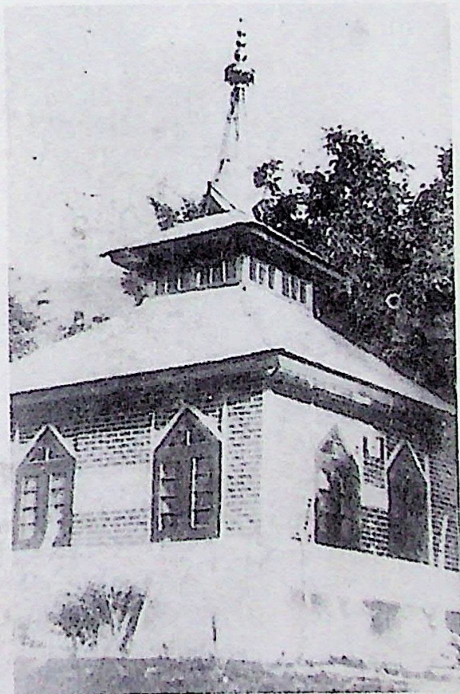
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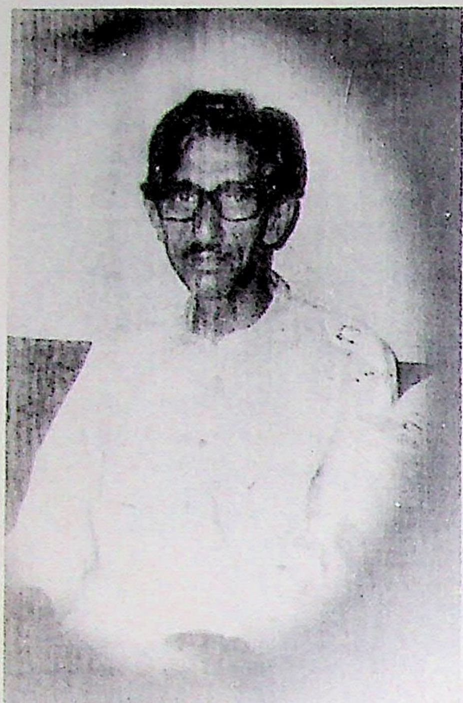
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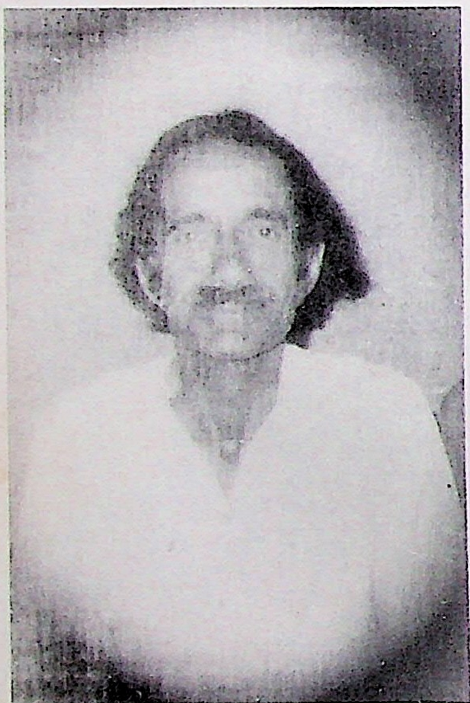
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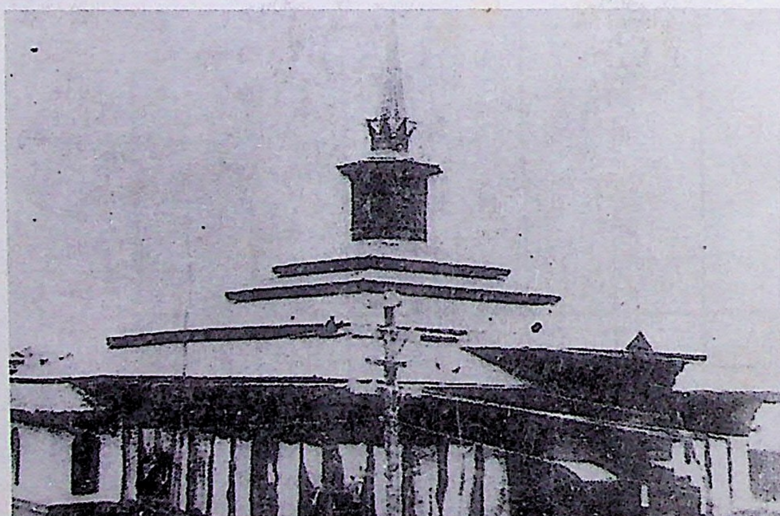
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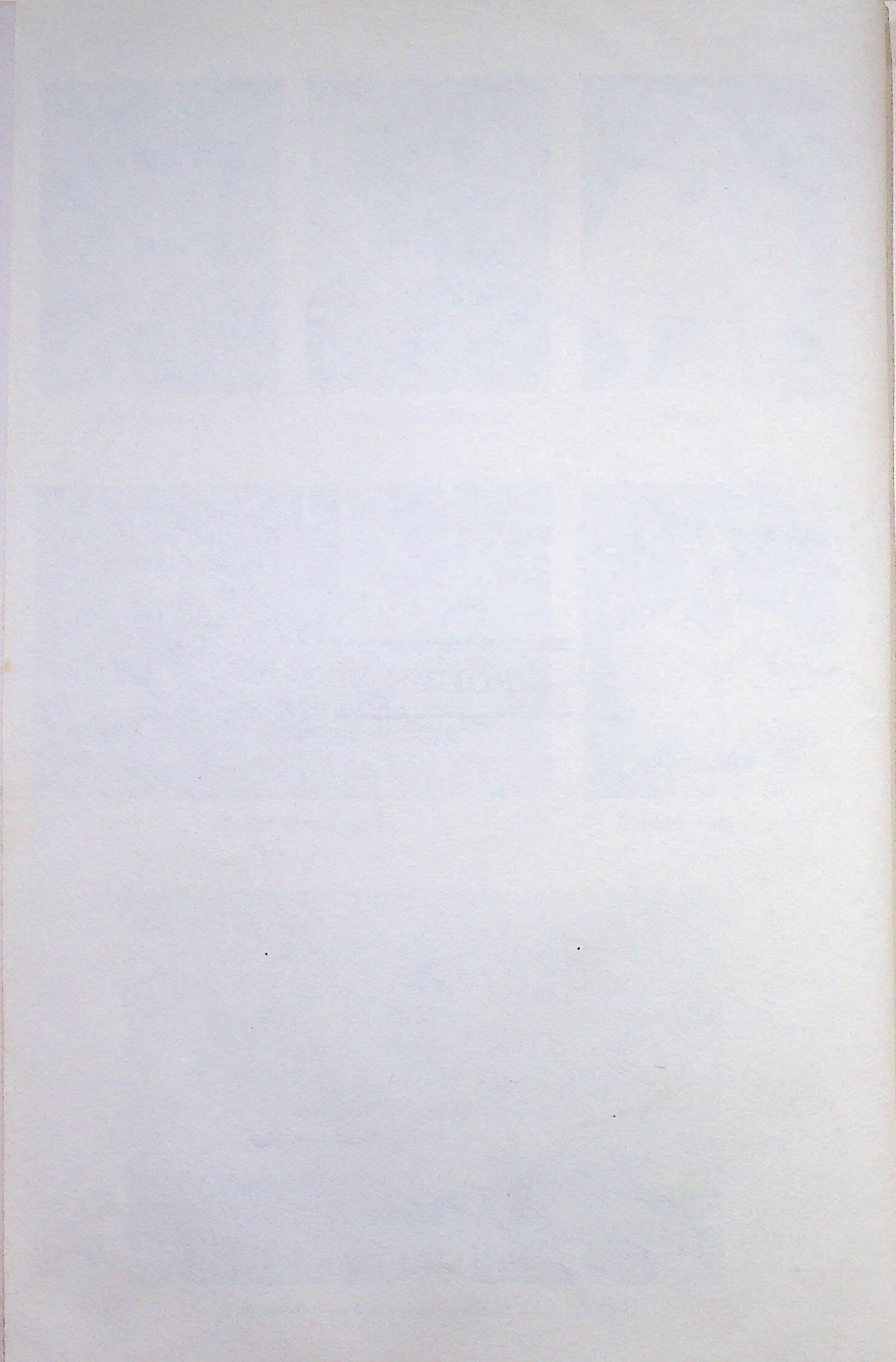


Ghulam Nabi Firaq



Charar-e-Sharief Shrine prior to May 11, 1995

POEMS



GULREZ

The immortal romance *Gulrez* was written in 1849 A.D. by Pir Maqbool Shah Kralawari (1802-1877), a great poet who dominated the literary scene in Kashmir during the first half of the nineteenth century, and even later. This *masnavi* can easily be determined as his *magnum opus*. It was a transcreation of the Persian legend of the same name written by Zia Nakshabi, a famous poet of Iran. Kralawari added a Kashmiri flavour to it.

While Nakshabi used both poetry and prose to narrate the touching love story of Ajab Malik, an ordinary mortal, and Noshe Lab, a honey-lipped fairy, Kralawari composed the whole legend in a verse form that reflects his high power of imagination and mastery over the Kashmiri language.

The climax in the story comes when Noshe Lab bitterly weeps and wails in the separation of her beloved. Nakshabi has treated this hallmark of the narrative in a casual manner, devoid of effect and sensibility, and the whole episode looks artificial. But Kralawari injects a new life into the chapter, making it a masterpiece of sorts, and the most splendid example of his art, which has remained unsurpassed so far. The 60-odd couplets deftly absorb and express the passionately intense yearning, pain and anguish ever suffered by a woman in Kashmir's literary history, Habba Khatoon (b. 1541) and Arnimal (d. 1800) notwithstanding. Almost every stanza is replete with simile, metaphor, symbol and allegory, which make the whole poem a unique sentimental experience.

SYNOPSIS

In the city of Nakshab, Iran, lived a king named Malik Taifoor. God had bestowed on him everything except a child. After long prayer, penance and fasting this wish of his also materialised in the shape of a son, who was given the name of Masoom Shah. He received full education and training in all arts befitting a prince.

One day, when the prince was holding an audience, he happened to spot a multi-coloured bird perched on the ceiling of the hall. Taking fancy for the lovely bird he strove hard to catch it but did not succeed. However, his courtiers enticed the bird with pearls — its staple diet — and put it in a cage. The prince felt elated and spent most of his time staring at the bird, but the latter languished as days passed. It refused to eat even pearls. The prince now felt sad on seeing the plight of the bird and himself also became weak and emaciated. The distraught bird ultimately spoke to him in a sweet human voice: "What ails thee, O prince? Had I been in my original natural form I could have alleviated your distress."

The prince was taken aback but he persuaded the bird to relate its mysterious tale to him ... The bird went on:

"I am the daughter of the King of Bait-ul-Amaan, a city situated in the fairyland. Noshe Lab is my name. Mahshoor Shah is my father while Gulbadan Begum is my mother.

"In Turkistan (modern Turkey) the ruling monarch has a son named Ajab Malik. When the fame of my unseen beauty reached him, he fell in love with me and set sail along with his friends to seek me out. The boat in which they were travelling unfortunately sank in the sea. Ajab Malik, the lone survivor, floated on a raft and arrived on an island where he found a fairy imprisoned in a cavern. She was my foster-sister, Naaz Mast. He freed her and she took him to our father's domain (modern Bahrain). It was Naaz

Mast who arranged my tryst with Ajab Malik in the palace garden, where we took a vow to remain faithful to each other.

"However, when my mother, Gulbadan Begum, incidentally had a glimpse of myself and Ajab Malik fast asleep after having shared the same bed for the night, she got furious. And using her supernatural powers, she lifted my beloved from the garden and dropped him in his native land, Turkistan. After flying back from there, she rudely shook me out of my slumber and confined me within my home. It was there that I poured out my heart in agony.

"My mother, enraged further by my trauma, got me incarnated in the shape of a bird. Full ten years have elapsed since then. Having remained wafted on my wings all this while, I have been wistfully yearning to have but one glimpse of my beloved, Ajab Malik."

NOSHE LABI HEND VEDAAKH

Subah phol bulbulav tul shor-o-gaugaa
gayas bedaar mucharem chashmi shohla
khabar aasim bo chhas der bar nigaaras
muqarrer gob chhe paen nendir bahaaras

Nazar traavim na ḍyuṭhum bagh na gul
na boozim az chaman aawaazi bulbul
gatah meejim subaah sapnum ghamuk shaam
museebath pyom ashk az gham korum vaam

Na ḍyuṭhum yaar na gulzari aan bagh
na raatuk aesh illaa bar jigar daag
hetsim vani din nigaaras gulazaaras
pas-o-peshas yameenas tay yasaaras

Vuchhum na royi zebaa yaare sunduy
nishaana kanh ti tas dildaare sunduy
bajaaye gul ba-seena khaar ḍyuṭhum
hyotum chhaandun khazaana maar ḍyuṭhum

Dapaan aasis dilas ba chashmi pur aab
so majlis raatechi maa aasihay khaab
su aeshah raahata doshiwaen bramah os
khushi shubes dapun kar, maatemah os

Machar on-nam tachar kornam badaenas
vadaan aalov hyatim din tas madaenas

NOSHE LAB'S LAMENTATIONS

The day dawned and bulbuls raised a raucous,
I opened my narcissus-like eyes, thinking
I was still frolicking in my friend's arms.
But ah! Sleep in spring leaves one dead-alive.

I looked around but found no roses,
no garden, no warbling of bulbuls.
Darkness engulfed me, the morn instantly
turned into dusk; I shed bitter tears of grief.

I couldn't see the beloved*, nor blossoms; the
midnight revelry had left only a scar within.
I sought my friend in all directions —
front, back, right and left.

I had no glimpse of his handsome face,
neither a clue, nor any mark of him:
a thorn replaced the rose in my heart,
a cobra hissed when the treasure was so near.

Tears welling up in my eyes, I said to myself,
"Last night's tryst was perhaps a dream!
That pleasure, solace was just a mirage,
it was *not* joy, but only mourning."

His love maddened me, heating my body;
I wept and made plaintive calls:

---

* Ajab Malik.

Nigaara be-madaara sarid mehraa
butaa maahe muneera khoob chehraa
hendir laagith nendir paavith chalooham
firaaqah lale-vun thaavith chalooham

Mato chaltam hato macheraavthus bo
yitam beyi sath gachem shareraavthus bo
nendir laagith chalun chooray ravaa chhaa
thavun yuth daag mastooray ravaa chhaa

Durah phali myaani kath goshas ratith jaay
tse goshan myon goyi-naa traavetham maay
khareedaaro kamu bazaare chhaarath
me taavan povtham kami vaane gaarath

Hareyas aaraval goolaab boyo
dazis mahtaab tan mahtaab royo
paree dewaane kaerthas mah jabeena
yiham na baaz lillah naazneena

Kamaan zan gom qad badvaljamaale
sedyo-mo teer ashkun Hiyamaale
Zulaikha Yusufo chey path anaeyas
mataeyas Waamiqo Uzra banaeyas

Batalkhi chhas divaan Shirin fariyaad
gachem-na paeda khosh deedar Farhaad

Thaphaa dith naqdi-dil hyaeth door goham
jafaa kaaro shilas saeni-choor pyoham
madanvaaro badan goham me zaalith
hekay no dooreruk aatash bo chaalith

O, moon-faced one! You are just like
an idol, cold and faithless.
After tricking me into deep slumber, you
left me to bear pangs of separation.

Pray, don't shun me through deceit,
Do come again, I shall feel reassured.
Is it fair to flee after feigning sleep?
Is it fair to leave such a scar on a beauty?

O my pearl! Whose ear have you adorned?
Did my plight not reach your ears?
Which bazaar, and which shop, should I
rummage to seek out my customer?

O rose! Your wild jessamine has withered,
my moon-like body has got consumed.
Your beautiful face has driven mad
even a fairy like me. Pray, rejoin me.

My tall Himaal-like figure turned into
a bow when the dart of love pierced it.
Like Zulaikha, I lost eyesight after
wailing day and night for my Yusuf.

And I too feel like Uzra, who got mad
in the unbearable separation of Waamiq.
Having got bitter, like Shirin, I also yearn
to ogle my good-looking Farhaad.

You broke into my chest, O tyrant!
Collected the booty (heart) and fled.
O Cupid! Your darts burn my body,
how can I bear the flame of separation?

Nigaara be-madaara sarid mehraa
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O Cupid! Your darts burn my body,
how can I bear the flame of separation?

Malaalah goyi kamyuk kava pochi chi rooṭhuk
kamis taaleh varas yeqbaal byuṭhuk
charaagah khor me chhorun ghamuk vaav
anegòt gom khosh-deedar mokh haav

Patay imahay amaa vath chham na moloom
natay dara-haa na hijarik teeri masmoom
shechhaa ladahay amaa kanh chhum na dardil
tse thovtham laala-royo daag bar dil

Kusoo sozay kusoo baavi yi taqreer
pakaem kus tòt sivaayay baadi shabgeer
hato haa subhikay khoshboyi vaavo
nito tas gulazaaras myani graavo

Ze garday raah chi daaman dinzi aval
pas aangah nati-natee gachizaes baras tal
adab rachhitay sadaah kaerzaes ba-halqay
khabar aahista vanizaes modri halqay

Jafaa andeshi kas traavith so mazloom
karith kath thaami laejith paami maesoom
muhith gohan vanith chhana kaensi zanaan
vaḥith gayi chaani pachhi ay jaani janaan

Paryun seenas sapun tas chaani holay
tse dolhas lola-rasityo ahad-o-quolay
muda aasiy karin aakhir judaayi
yohay chha sae tareeqay haq adaayi

Shikasta dil karith tannaaz-o-magroor
saman andaame bub baerthas ze raenboor

What made you cross with me? Which
lucky maiden's fortune has smiled?
I lit a lamp, the tempest arose and
it was dark again. Pray, show me your face.

Had I known the path taken by you,
I would follow you and not face
the poisoned darts of separation. I
can't even find a sympathetic courier.

Only the nocturnal wind can carry
my pathetic plaint to you...
O, sweet-scented morning breeze!
Pray, take my message to my beloved.

First get your apron dusted, then,
with your natural quiver, go to his door.
Tap the iron latch-grip with humility
and deliver the plaint in a sweet tone:

"You are unjust, you forsook that
innocent soul to face calumny.
You robbed her; she cannot confide in
anyone; she is simply burning in love.

"Her bosom is full of holes, like a sieve:
a ruthless lover did not keep his word.
Your plan was to alienate her, but
is this the way to reciprocate friendship?

"You broke her heart for your 'pride'
and 'prestige'; you were like the
jessamine that heals but, instead,
you filled her breast with poison."

Hato vaavo chi kyah zaanak me kyah gav
gamit vaalinji chhim damgeeraki srav
bihith kath gulshanas manz aan gul andaam
sahee sarvun sahee anizaem me paigaam

Chhetay mashal gayas yaavun vatay gom
sotaeyus vȧdi-vadee shoras zetay pyom

Tanuras ashkanis manz chhas hatab zan
vanas daedevan korum tami sarva-sabzan

Khazaanah chaam atsivinsiy bahaaras
suli doh loosetum poh gom haaras
hendur zan gajise shraavani aaftabai
bitaabam chun tabad maahi ba-taabai

Pholaevanisiy bahaaras arni rang gom
molaelas aeshikis khazras sharang gom
du-haftachi zooni sar tulthiyi gruhun pyom
shagoofas sheen, gulzaaras kruhun pyom

Hiyay ther yaavanich kertham barah me
zarah-zara seem-tan zaajith zarah me
shama surat ba chhas giryaan-o-sozaan
chu parvaana su be-parvah na bozaan

Yemberzal tas bombooreni maayi vajthas
frakah-vani tser grakavani kraayi tajthus

O breeze! You can't imagine what has
befallen me. My kidney is full of gashes.
Go and see in which garden he is hiding
and fetch me his reply correctly.

Like a torch, I got extinguished when
my beloved left. I became exhausted
and weak after shedding copious tears.
Fire of love kindled the embers again.

Like the round hard wood, I got consumed
in the oven of love. Though himself verdant
like cypress, he turned my lush green
woodland into scorched earth.

The fall came when spring had just begun,
the sun set early, Ashaad turned into Paush.
Like ice, I melted in the summer heat.
Like fish, I got roasted by fire (of love).

My spring blossoms turned pale and dull,
someone despoiled me of pleasure, luxury.
the full moon was hid early by eclipse,
snow wrecked the buds, the garden vanished.

The jessamine of my youth languished;
love fever lit my silvery body bit by bit.
I weep and burn like the candle but,
he the moth, feels unconcerned, or deaf.

The narcissus suffered because of its
infatuation for the bumble bee, but
what was the fault of the gay sparrow
who got fried in the boiling cauldron?

Sanobar kaamatan haej veer kaernas
sonas sartal gayam, tash-heer kaernas
saruk pamposh aasis fojmatsen haar
karus gharqaabi gham khursheed rukhsaar

Duphaeras shaam myulum khaam kaare
duras gom fota rovum tota haare
gajis kaji kaamadivani aama naepayas
logum var laavi mooray aava say-yas

Kabaabaek paathi tajnus garam taavay
adaedaez tsin gayam sarmoori laavay
tsatith kami shathraniy dyutnam methir me
ladith taasas paeyam tosas athir me.

Yithis jaananasiy rostuy lasaa bo
su traavith gaeraniy seetaen basaa bo
su traavith kar yiyam nendir ta neh me
su traavith sherbatay shirin chha veh me
su traavith mange kyah yath paety-prangas
su traavith maaze kar bo naksh-o-rangas

***

Saraasimah gaeyas jaaman dyutum chaak
malum aaina paanas soor tay khaak
vedaakh aasis divaan hijarik karaan lell
valo kaerthas barah taazay yemberzal

(Gulrez was first published in 1921 A.D. by Ghulam Mohammed Noor Mohammed, Srinagar.)

The cypress-statured one bent me into a
notorious curved willow; gold became brass.
Like a lotus in the lake, I bloomed in Ashaad
but grief drowned my sunny face in water.

Noon became dusk, my pearl was false; the
maina lost the parrot due to immaturity.
Cupid's love consumed me: the delicate
switch that he twisted got emaciated.

He fried me like *kabaab* on the hot-plate;
he discarded me like a half-burnt bough.
Who beguiled him? Moths nibbled at *pashmina**
even in the sealed baked-clay container!

Can I survive sans such beloved?
Can I desert him to live with strangers?
Can I get sleep, solace without him?
Without him, sweet *sherbat*** is poison for me!
Without him, of what avail my silken bed?
Even the hues, designs of the room can't distract
me!

***

... I was woebegone, I tore my garments,
and besmirched my body with ash and dust.
I wailed aloud and cursed separation thus:
"Come, a fresh narcissus has withered for you!"

---

* Fine quality wool obtained from Tibetan goats.
** A cooling drink of diluted fruit-juices.

LAL DED

The illustrious saint-poetess Lalleshwari, popularly known as Lal Ded (1335-1385 A.D.), is by far the greatest litterateur produced by Kashmir. She composed delectable *vaakh* (short, crisp sayings) which were the characteristic of the earliest verse in the Valley. *Vaakh* achieved its culmination in her time. Shitikanth, who lived 100 years earlier and also wrote *vaakh*, was perhaps the first well-known poet of Kashmir.

Lal Ded represented the Trika philosophy and was the most towering pillar of the Shaivite tradition. However, it was only in 1779, more than four centuries after her death, that 60 of her *vaakh* were first discovered and compiled in the Sharada script by the great scholar and researcher Bhaskar Razdan. They were published by the Research and Publications Department, Srinagar, thus removing the dark mask of time behind which this eminent poetess had remained hidden for ages. It was left to Sir George Abraham Grierson and Lionel D. Barnett to later trace more of her *vaakh*, edit them and get them published in London in 1920 under the title of *Lalla-Vakyani*.

Lalleshwari is not only the greatest saint-poetess of Kashmir but also a profound Shaivite philosopher, sage, seer and creative genius so far unsurpassed by any other Kashmiri thinker. The middle of the 14th century was a period of reorientation of religious and moral values in Kashmir. Sanskrit being the language of the learned, the common man used a form of Prakrit which did not differ much in essentials. The impact of Islam was being felt by the people. However, for nearly two centuries earlier, the

new religion itself had been so much conditioned by the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and Upanishadic thought prevalent in Central Asia and Persia that a new cult of Islamic mysticism emerged in the garb of Sufism. This class of 'wandering minstrels', with their humanistic approach to religion, found a ready response from the people of the Valley. Later, Kashmir itself produced a number of mystics and saints who, by virtue of their teachings and selfless lives, became the most shining specimens of true religion and morality.

Lalla was born at the village of Pandrethan (ancient Puranadhisthana), five kilometres from Srinagar. She was married at the age of twelve to a young man in a Brahmin family but her mother-in-law treated her cruelly. The latter reproached and scolded her on the slightest pretext, but she bore all the taunts and insults without a murmur. Her mother-in-law would serve food to her by putting a lump of stone in her plate over which she spread a thin layer of cooked rice to make it look quite a large heap. Lalla ate the scanty rice, quietly washed the stone and put it back in the kitchen. She has made reference to this in her sayings thus:

Ho'nd maertan kina kaṭh,
Lalli nalavaṭh tsali na zaanh.

(They may kill a big sheep or a tender lamb,
Lalla will have her lump of stone all right).
Tr. by J.L. Kaul

Among the miracles performed by Lal Ded is one connected with the birth of Nund Rishi, her junior contemporary. According to tradition, the new-born baby did not suck at his mother's breast for three days. The anxious parents, unable to grasp this phenomenon, resorted to the usual remedies but in vain. Then, all of a sudden, Lalla appeared at the house, took the babe in her lap, put

her own pep into his mouth and whispered a line into his ear. The baby immediately began sucking:

Yina mandachhukh na, chana chhukh mandachhaan!

(Ashamed thou wert not of being born! Shouldst thou fight shy of sucking now?)

Tr. by B.N. Parimoo

How Lal Ded, on being accused of infidelity to her husband following the incident of the "pitcher of water", came to the end of her patience and left her home and hearth never to return, is common knowledge. The incident has been recorded by all chroniclers and does not need repetition in detail. The simple truth is that her routine of going to fetch water from the *ghat* in pre-dawn hours was nothing but a tryst with God, on whom she used to meditate at a quiet spot away from her home, the shrine of Natakeshwa Bhairava at Zinypor village. There she held her daily communion with Lord Shiva. But even such excursions into the realm of the soul were misconstrued by the dirty mind of her mother-in-law.

SELECTED VAAKH

When Lal Ded's *sadhana* and yogic prowess became known, her fame spread and people flocked to see the 'Yogini', it was time for her to leave her home:

Gworan vo'n-nam kunuy vatsun,
Nebra do'pnam andar atsun,
Suy gav Lalli me vaakh ta vatsun,
Tawai me hyotum nangai natsun.

My guru gave me but one precept;
"From without withdraw your gaze within
and fix it on the inmost self."

I, Lalla, took to heart this one precept,
and therefore naked I began to dance.

***

Aami pana sodras naavi chhas lamaan,
Kati bozi myon dai meti diya taar.
Aamaen ṭaakaen pony zàn shamaan,
Zuv chhum bramaan ghare gatsahaa.

With a rope of loose-spun thread
I am towing my boat upon the sea.
Would that God heard my prayer
and brought me safely across!
Like water in cups of unbaked clay
I run to waste.
Would God I were to reach my home!

***

Aayas vatey gayas na vatey,
Suma sothe maṇz loosum doh,
Chandas vuchhum haar na athey,
Yath naava-taaras dima kyaa bo.

By the highway I came,
but by the highway I return not.
So I find me still on the embankment,
not having gone even half the way.
And the day is done, the light has failed.
I search my pocket but not a cowrie find:
What shall I pay for the ferry fee?

***

Hachavi haerinji pyatsuv kaan gom,
Abakh chhaan pyom yeth raazdaaney,
Maṇz baag baazras kulfe-ròs vaan gom,
Tirtha-ròs paan gom, kus maali zaanai.

A wooden bow and rush grass for an arrow,
A carpenter unskilled and a palace to build;
A shop unlocked in a busy bazaar;
A body uncleansed by waters holy —
Oh dear! Who knows what hath befallen me.

***

Tala chhuy zyos ta paeṭha chhùkh natsaan,
Vanta maali màn kitha patsaan chhuy,
Soruy sòmbrith yatee chhuy motsaan,
Vanta maali a'n kitha rotsaan chhuy.

There is a yawning pit underneath you,
and you are dancing overhead.
Pray, sir, how can you bring yourself to dance?
See, the riches you are amassing here,
nothing of them will go with you.
Pray, sir, how can you relish your food and drink?

***

Da'mi ḍeeṭhi'm nad vahav'unee,
Da'mi ḍuṭhum sum na ta taar.
Da'mi ḍiṭhim th'er pholevu'ni,
Da'mi ḍuṭhum guḻ na ta khaar.

Now I saw a stream flowing;
now neither bank nor bridge was seen.
Now I saw a bush in bloom;
now neither rose nor thorn was seen.

***

Da'mi ḍiṭhi'm ga'j dazavuni,
Da'mi ḍuṭhu'm dih na ta naar,
Da'mi ḍiṭhi'm Pandavan hinz maaji,
Da'mi ḍiṭhi'm kraaji maas.

Now I saw the hearth ablaze,
now I saw neither fire nor smoke.
Now I saw the Pandavi mother,
now she was but a potter's aunt.

***

Kyaah kara paantsan dahan ta kaahan,
Wokhshu'n yeth legi karith yim gayi;
Saeri samahan yeth ra'zi lamahan,
Ada kyaazi raavihey kaahan gaav.

Ah me! The Five (*bhuta*-s), the Ten (*indriya*-s),
and the Eleventh, their Lord the mind,
scraped this pot* and went away.
Had all together pulled on the rope,
Why should the Eleven have lost the cow?
(Why should the soul have gone astray?)

***

Moodas gyaanich kåth no va'ny-zey,
Khåras gor dina raavi doh;
Seki shaathas byol no va'vy-zey,
Raav'rzina kŏm yaajan teel.

Impart not esoteric truth to fools,

---

* The living body.

nor on molasses feed an ass.
Do not sow seed in sandy beds,
nor waste your oil cakes on bran.

***

Haa manushi kyaazi chhuk vuthaan seki loor,
Ami ràti haa-maali pakina naav;
Leukhuy yi Naaraani karm'ni rikhi,
Tee maali heaky na phirit kaanh.

O man, why do you twist a stick of sand?*
You cannot tow your boat with it.
What God has written "in Karma's line"
cannot be altered or reversed.

***

Shiv chhuy thàli-thàli rozaan,
Mo zaan Huond ta Musalman.
Tr'uk hai chhuk ta paan prazanaav,
Soi chhai Saahibas zaani-zaan.

Shiva abides in all that is, everywhere;
then do not discriminate between Hindu and Musalman.
If thou art wise, know thyself;
that is true knowledge of the Lord.

***

* Ceremonial rites, *puja* and *yajna*.

Gràṭa chhu pheraan zere zere,
Avahukuy zaani gràṭuk ts'al,
Gràṭa yeli pheri ta zaev'ul neri,
Gov vaati paanai gràṭa'bal.

Sure and steady the mill will turn
once you propel the wheel.
The mind is the pivot, it should know
how best to turn the mill.
And once it turns, it will grind fine,
and grain will find its way to the mill.

Translations by J.L. Kaul

(*Courtesy*: *Lal Ded*, Sahitya Akademi.)

NUND RISHI

Nund Rishi (b. 1377) — full name Sheikh Noor-ud-din Wali and popularly known as Sheikh-ul-Alam — was Lal Ded's contemporary. Like her, he also wrote *vaakh* which, however, came to be termed as *shruk* (a corrupt form of Sanskrit *shalok*). He too was a great upholder of the mystic tradition. In fact, he can be described as the first Sufi poet of Kashmir and the father of Kashmiri *nazm*. (No less credit for evolving this genre may also be given to Mahmud Gami, b. 1765).

Nund Rishi was born a Hindu but later got converted to Islam. He was a prominent exponent of Islamic tenets to which he gave a distinct Kashmiri coating and a correct and foolproof interpretation. It was he who founded the 'Reshi' order in the Valley. This cult was successful in synthesising different cultural ways of life. This was Nund Rishi's greatest achievement at a time when Sultan Sikandar, the iconoclast, had unleashed a reign of terror on a sizable section of his subjects. His *dargah*,* situated at Charar-e-Sharief, 55 kilometres from Srinagar, was enthusiastically thronged by all people irrespective of their faith, for seeking the patron saint's blessings and benediction.

Prof. B.N. Parimoo, in his illuminating treatise on Nund Rishi entitled *Unity in Diversity*, has dwelt on the cultural synthesis referred to above in these words: "Lal Ded and Nund-Ryosh have come down to us, over the centuries, as apostles of true knowledge. They have a message to give

---

* The dargah was sacked by ISI-backed foreign mercenaries on May 11, 1995.

and could not, perhaps, help singing as an inspired compulsion. They touch the deepest chords of human sensibility. It is not for nothing that we recite the *vaakh* of Lal Ded and *shruks* of the Sheikh with gusto and feeling. The meaning comes home, mixes with the blood and becomes part and parcel of our being. A cultural rejuvenation takes place."

SELECTED SHRUKS

The soul is as fleeting as the body which enshrines it. This world is as ephemeral as the thoughts which fashion it.
Such verses of mine demand undivided contemplation. O Great Lord! Do away with my sinful demeanour.

***

Having taken birth I was nursed and reared by my mother, a wooden cradle was built for me.
Having grown up, I was thrown to the wolves. Nobody cared for me, even my kith and kin dispossessed me of my very home and hearth.

Having become senile and old, I realised that my coming to life was a hoax, a terrible calamity. At every inch of my closing life, I feel despondent and forlorn.
Having cast off my mortal frame, everybody will forget me, as if they owed nothing to me, or I to them.
Actually, in the life-hereafter all the scores need be settled.

***

A saint was lost amongst a gang of thieves; a gorgeous swan was lost amidst a flock of crows!

***

Some got blisters even with cold water; and some through mental drill transformed themselves into fire-personified.
Some found rubies out of cursed rubble, and some returned empty-handed from Ceylon even.

***

When the carpenter will carve out your sandalwood body into pieces, on which other wood-worker will you depend in the life hereafter to join these pieces once again? What will be the wages you are supposed to pay him?

***

Tas Padmaan-porachi Lalei,
Tami galei amrit pivaa,
Tami Shiv wooch thali-thaley,
Tithuy me var dita, Divaa.

That Lalla of Padmanpora (modern Pampore) drank nectar divine gulp by gulp. She saw Shiva face to face. She carved for herself the seraphic stature of an incarnation. O Deva! Grant that very boon to me also.

Tr. by K.N. Dhar*

***

Ramas pata pohloo,
Tamy dumas vakhun kavaa:
Su Harmukha wujith tsoloo,
Tithuy me var dita, Divaa.

---

* *A Rosary of Hundred Beads*, 1981.

The shepherd followed Shiva,
How did he come by the tail?*
Entering Harmukh, he disappeared there!
O Lord, bestow a similar boon upon me.

Tr. by B.N. Parimoo

---

* The tail of Lord Shiva's bull, Nandi.

MAHMUD GAMI

The nineteenth century witnessed a prolific growth of Kashmiri literature. Right at the end of the 18th century a new literary movement was afoot which flourished up to 1928 A.D. Literary men, mostly from the villages, began to remodel their native language on Persian. This movement, initiated by Mahmud Gami (1765-1855), got its impetus from Persian language. Several literary art forms of Iran were borrowed and put to use. The main such genres were ghazal and *masnavi*. There was a spate of translations and adaptations from Persian originals. Kashmiri poets owned Persian themes of legend, *daastan* (prose tale) and history such as Yusuf Zulaikha, Shirin Farhad, Sohrab and Rustom and Laila Majnun. Thus dawned the era of *masnavi*s in Kashmir.

The older forms of verse like *vatsun* were not, however, discarded altogether. They were employed in long narrative poems. The songs and ghazals of the 19th century were more sensuous, ornate and sophisticated. In the mystical and devotional poetry also there was a change in phrase, idiom and symbol.

Mahmud Gami, also referred to as Mard-i-Ustad, was one of the most outstanding poets of the medieval period. He is rightly called the father of Kashmiri ghazal and *naat*. He was also a prolific *nazm* writer. It was he who introduced these art forms. He wrote nine *masnavi*s and several *vatsun*s and strode the literary scene of his time like a Colossus. He became a legend in his own lifetime. His ghazals set the pattern for his successors. He was the first to introduce man as lover in Kashmiri literature. Until then, woman had played that role. He also innovated the *rov* dance song. His

love romances reveal a high quality of passion. He is popularly called the Nizami of Kashmir. Mahmud Gami was born during the Afghan period and lived through the whole length of Sikh rule that followed in the State. For Kashmir this was an age of oppression and despotic exercise of power. Aravaer, the village where he was born, falls in the Shahabad area of southern Kashmir. He received his early education in Arabic and Persian. According to tradition he was intelligent and displayed a genial temperament. Though he had great hold on Persian in which he initially tried his hand, after switching over to Kashmiri he served this language with a unique devotion. His idiom is necessarily homespun. He sang love lyrics in a tone closely bordering on that of folk-songs.

Gami reflects in his poetry a deep craving for union with God, and since the whole universe is only His reflection or manifestation His love envelopes all that exists:

The river is fathomless,
I find no bridge to cross.
The river of love
sweeps me along.

In several of his verses he refers to Harmukh (the abode of Lord Shiva) and the Shaivite image:

My Sanyas,...
with his throne on Harmukh peak,
made me wander through the world;
genial Gopal am I.

***

I am His Gopal,
searching for my Sanyas
in the forests deep.
Pray, cast aversion off,
and fulfil Your promise.

***

Silver sheen of Your forehead
and the sabre ever on it,
and the serpent on the treasure;
come to me.

Mahmud Gami's *vatsuns* have become immortal. Their music can be felt even without understanding them:

Katyoo chhukh nunda baaney
walo maashoqa myaaney

***

Kar sa myon nyaay anday
maer mandey madanwaaro

***

Yaar khatsaav Pompri vatey
kong-poshav rot naalamatey

(My Love had gone to Pampore for a walk; the saffron flowers hugged Him there.)

In a deep meditative tone, the mood of the poet undergoes a change from the sensual to the reflective:

Pour me cupfuls of the wine of love,
the wine of realisation;
over and over again.
May I sacrifice my life for you.

I will lull you in the cradle of love,
lovely mine!
Oh! If I could see you face to face,
smiling blossom-mouthed!
May I sacrifice my life for you.

The river entered the drop,
    the drop was named river,
    a seed furnished a granary;
May I sacrifice my life for you.

The poem, 'Naad laayay myaani Yusufo valo', one of the best compositions of Mahmud Gami, is even now sung by women along with a *rov* dance or while toiling in the fields:

When you died
    the sun hid its face,
    the world turned dark and the
    young beauties tormented themselves.
I call you my Yusuf, come!

The bulbul gave up singing,
    the rose its raiment rent.
    the *sombul** hung its neck in grief.
I call you my Yusuf, come!

Death! You are cruel,
    you put the blame on some trash,
    and you fill the graveyards,
    'tis an ordeal of a Doomsday,
    when the lovers part.
I call you my Yusuf, come!

Your death hunched up
    the walls of heaven,
    deprived me of my eyesight.
    Don't you die! Bride's henna
    is yet on my nails fresh.
I call you my Yusuf, come!

Translations by Muzaffar Aazim

(*Courtesy*: *Mahmud Gami*, monograph; Sahitya Akademi.)

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* Hyacinth.

SANGARMAALAN CHHAAYI LO LO

Sȧmy tavi viginev rȯv hai karavaaey,
sangarmaalan chhaayi lo lo.

Sonasund zaenpaana mȯkhtaevi jaalar,
sadafaevy karasaey paayi lo lo.

Ora yeli yiyam tai bronṭha hai neras,
seety haeth tsonza tai daayi lo lo.

AAWAAZ VAAETSIY NO

Chaani bȧr tȧl raavyam raaetsiy,
aawaaz vaaetsiy no.

Khaaesy vȯzaly bȧrga chhȧtsay,
chhas sȯrgich yemberzal,
kaaely maelav qayaamȧtsiy,
aawaaz vaaetsiy no.

Vanahaa yechh ȧshkaeni braaentsiy,
kan thaavto Mahmoodas,
kaman soortan gachhaan metsiy,
aawaaz vaaetsiy no.

GATHER, O NYMPHS

Gather, O nymphs, for a *rov* dance
in the shadow of mountain peaks
while the day is about to dawn.

I will build for my beloved a
palanquin of gold, with ivory
posts and fringes of pearls.

And when he comes, I shall go
to receive him outside my home,
with a bevy of maids and friends.

DID YOU NOT HEAR MY CALL?

I spent nights on end at your door,
did you not hear my call?

Like the divine narcissus, I too
have red bells and pale petals.
I wait for you; but we may meet
only on the Day of Judgment.

I would confide in you in the guise
of love. Only lend your ear to
Mahmood. Lovely faces turn into
ashes. Do you not hear my call?

HABBA KHATOON

The history of Kashmiri literature during the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century is clouded in oblivion. Not much is known even about the life of the celebrated queen-songstress, Habba Khatoon, who was born some time between 1541 and 1551 A.D. in the Chandhar village of Pampore tehsil. Her father Abdi Rathar was a well-to-do farmer. She was given the name of Zoon, the Kashmiri word for the moon derived from the Sanskrit *jyotsna*.

Even otherwise, as she became an adolescent, she was so famous for her ravishing beauty that people from far and near flocked to have a glimpse of her face. After an initial grooming in Arabic and Persian, which she learnt with zeal and zest, her father got her wedded to Aziz Lone, a peasant boy of his own clan and much younger to her in age. A born poetess as she was, Zoon later began to sing songs composed by herself.

Her in-laws took exception to this and taunted and scolded her for bringing a bad name to their 'respectable' family. Even Aziz Lone, who was illiterate, boorish and unmannerly, strongly objected and she was obliged to give up her studies and take to farming. But this arrangement could not restrict her natural compulsion to sing. Due to the harshness, hostility and cruelty of her mother-in-law she felt miserable. Finally she was asked on a pretext to pack up and go to her parental home for good.

This was for her the first taste of the ways of an unkind world. She badly missed her husband whom she loved

ardently and to whom she had always remained faithful. But Aziz Lone does not seem to have made any concession to her physical charm, though she tried her level best to develop his tastes and accomplishments which would make him a tolerable husband. She has referred to this state of her mind in her famous lyric 'Chhaav myaeny daenai posh' ('Enjoy My Pomegranate Blossoms'). However, once back in her parental house, Habba Khatoon got busy in household chores like tending of cattle, searching for herbs and wild fruits and fetching water from the spring or stream.

Habba Khatoon was born in an era when Kashmir suffered much political, social and economic distress. The ruling dynasty of the Sultans, distinguished by the illustrious monarch, Zain-ul-Abdin, popularly called Bad Shah, had grown weak and the feudal barons took over. While internecine warfare continued unabated, a large number of mansions, bridges and habitations were razed to the ground. Hunger and famine stalked the Valley. The last Sultan, Habib Shah, was forced to abdicate in 1554 and the throne was occupied by Ali Khan of the powerful Chak clan. The Chaks, being Shias, the brunt of their missionary zeal fell on both Hindus and Sunni-Muslims.

The last scion of the Chak dynasty, Yusuf Shah Chak, was a great scholar and a poet in his own right. He composed verses in Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri. He was fond of art and music both of which he patronised. Before his ascension to the throne, he was once taking a stroll near the famous saffron-beds of Pampore when he happened to have a look at pretty Habba Khatoon singing in a nearby field. Her mellifluous voice and beauty both charmed him instantly. The prince got 'talaq' for her on a payment of 5,000 dirhams to her husband. He straightaway married her and later, on ascending the throne in 1578 A.D., made her his queen which status she enjoyed for 14 years. (According to Pandit Birbal Kachru, who wrote a history of Kashmir 250

years after her death, Yusuf Shah never married her but kept her only as a concubine*).

Yusuf Shah and Habba Khatoon, who were now aged 23 and 29 respectively, spent most of their time in Gulmarg, Sonamarg, lakes and flower gardens and other beauty spots. They drank to the lees from the fountain of pleasure. Side by side, the art of Habba Khatoon also flourished. However, this six-year phase of her sentimental life suddenly ended in 1580 A.D. when Mughal rule started in Kashmir. Yusuf Shah was put under arrest on Emperor Akbar's orders and detained in far-off Bengal. Akbar had for long set his eyes on Kashmir and he also took the opportunity to attach Yusuf Shah to his army. At this juncture the latter had been at the helm in his homeland for only one year and two months.**

Habba Khatoon was forlorn and woebegone and her hidden agony poured forth in the form of titillating ditties of the *lol* genre which attained its zenith in her time. She is indeed the founder of the lyric of romantic love in Kashmiri. Again, she ensured continuity of the stream of Kashmiri poetry started over 200 years earlier by Lal Ded and Nund Rishi, thereby giving it a fresh lease of life and a new momentum. The idioms, metaphors and images used by her are still fresh and current today.

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* Mohammad Din Fauq, in his Urdu book *Khwateen-i-Kashmir*, published in 1940, however says that Habba Khatoon became a full-fledged queen after her 'marriage' with Yusuf Shah Chak.

** To arrive at a cohesive conclusion about the duration of Habba Khatoon's conjugal love it will be necessary to take recourse to the law of averages. Presuming that she was born in 1545 A.D., she got married to Yusuf Shah in 1574 at the age of 29. Later in 1578, when Yusuf Shah became the ruler, she automatically became the queen and enjoyed that status even after 1580 when he was deported to Bengal. Obviously, she had spent a total period of six years in the company of her husband. Judging by the same standard, she had completed a life span of 59 years at the time of her death in 1604. There are no doubts about the year of her death.

Habba Khatoon died in 1604 A.D. dejected and doomed, unwept and unsung but she will remain immortal in her melodious *lol* songs and *vatsuns*. Her grave exists at Athavajan in Srinagar by the side of poet Mahjoor's mausoleum.

WAATI KYAH MYAANI MARNAI

Raah bakhaeshtam saari parvardigaaro
tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnai

Hena bo aayas dyȧn kaeho bȧrayo
vėna kuy rȧng gom khaasa bȧbarey
lȯli suy thovthamo lȧla vun naaro
tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnai

Lȧdy-lȧdy draahamo maal khichaalo
chhȧri athȧ saavaenai lȧri qabrey
ȧda konȧ mȧdha vȯth-ham lokachaaro
tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnai

Seepaara trihamȧra pȧrim ȧki aano
phera no kuni gom zeri zabrey
ashakun khȧt kaensy pȯr na yek baaro
tse keho vaatiyo myaani marnai

TAMBALOVNAM HOOREY PAAN

Neri vesiye laala maa doorey
tambalovnam hoorey paan

Masvali baagas ḍoth pyom phulayey
chenu paano brȧm samsaar
lanji hochi tai meva kyuth naerey
tambalovnam hooorey paan

WHAT WILL YOU GAIN BY MY DEATH?

O God! Overlook, forgive all my sins!
Would You gain anything if I die?

Having got entangled, I can't pass days.
A pretty basil has become pale, hueless
with a scorching flame to bear inside.
Would You gain anything if I die?

O man! Don't flourish your amassed wares,
you will be put in the grave empty-handed:
When will you cool down to this truth?
Would You gain anything if I die?

I perused Thirty Chapters* at a stretch,
without committing a single mistake.
None could grasp 'Love' in one reading.
Would You gain anything if I die?

HE HAS ENTICED MY HEART

Come friend, let us run after the beloved,
lest he should go still farther;
He has enticed a fairy's heart.

My iris garden blossoms were hit by hail:
isn't the world really like a dream?
A withered bough cannot bear fruit....

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* Chapters of the Quran.

Draayi kukilaa haali maedaanas
so chhi karaan Goo-venda Goo
so ti laejmich vaalavaashi hoorey
tambalovnam hoorey paan

Yaery loynam zaaviji moorey
poochi tsoṭnam paety anzul
gachhahaa maalyun su ti chhum dooorey
tambalovnam hoorey paan

Yaaeny khàtsis yaavanạni gurey
tàna zazari vòlnam naal
balaay zazaris ta zazarini taerey
tambalovnàm hoorey paan

CHAARA KAR MYON MAALINYO

Waerivyen seety vaara chhas no
chaara kar myon maalinyo

Ghari bo draayes aaba nàtis
nòt me phutmo maalinyo
yaa ta deetav nàti nòta, nàta
haarae nàti chay maalinyo

Shury paanas sendir gayi mo
vuḍari khasun kuḍur pyomo
kàtri chhaaraan kataer saeni mo
vàtri noon pyom maalinyo

Like a nightingale, I flew over fields
and sang of the grace of Govind,
but got entangled in the snare of Fate....

My lord beat me with a switch and
tore my headgear. I would go to my
parental house, but that too is far off....

When my youth was still at full gallop
decay entwined me prematurely;
cursed be decay that chills the marrow....

COME TO MY RESCUE, O PARENTS!

I am not at ease in the in-laws' house,
Do come to my rescue, O my parents!

I left home to fetch a pot of water,
the water-pot broke inadvertently.
Either replace the shattered pot,
or, pay its cost, I pray to you!

My youthful body has got emaciated,
can't mount back-breaking plateaus.
Baked-clay pieces have blistered
my feet, with salt added to injury.

Hàshi layinam taepsey thàf
sui me gav marna khota sàkh
yendrà pachi paeth nendir paeyimo
tsàkhir phuṭamo maalinyo

Yaara daadey taari gayi so
baarabukh chhum aamatuy
Habba Khotooni vòn ishaaraa
dil hushaaraa maalinyo

GINDANEY DRAAYAS

Gindaney draayas toory gayesae rasith
dohdari yaamat loosith gom

Làri maṇz aaesis burqa kasith
bàra yeli draayas lògum naav
vanaki tàpa reshy tàpa aayi vasith
dohdari yaamat loosith gom

Vaanas osum maalah tsaesith
soruy aalam vuchhinay draam
maal yeli rovum mol gom vasith
dohdari yaamat loosith gom

Maaliny myaeni arbaab aesi
tavai draam Habba Khotoon naav
kàm-kàm gondar aayi tsaesith
dohdari yaamat loosith gom

My mother-in-law grabbed my hair,
worse than death this was for me.
I fell asleep upon the spinning wheel
and incidentally broke the shaft.

I feel woebegone without my friend,
my anguish overflows the brim.
Habba Khatoon has given you a hint,
my paternal side, be watchful!

I WENT TO PLAY BUT RETURNED NOT

I left home for play but could not return
till the day ended and the sun set.

While in my house I drew a tight veil,
once among crowds, I got name and fame.
Even *rishis* descended from the woods,
till the day ended and the sun set.

My shop was filled with merchandise,
the whole world came out to see me.
When the shop got empty, my value dropped,
till the day ended and the sun set.

My parents were from a noble family,
so I came to be known as Habba Khatoon.
Handsome youths flocked to see me,
till the day ended and the sun set.

WALO MYAANI POSHEY MADANO

Dil nith raṭitham goshey
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy gachhavai hiyey
yus màri su kati yiyey
praaraan chhas chaani ziyey
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy gachhavai handey
laanyun nyaai kàti andey
looka maty kaḍnas randey
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy gachhavai babrey
chhokh me loynam tabrey
kaanchhah sooznam na khabrey
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy gachhavai krechhey
looka maty tujnas rechhey
timan tay myon hyu gachhey
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy khasavai vàn tai
lookav barihas kàn tai
tee booz tamy saadan tai
walo myaani poshey madano!

Wolai vesy vasavai bòn tai
kana kuy dimasai sòn tai
sòn myon dòn moharan tai
walo myaani poshey madano!

COME, MY FLOWER-LIKE CUPID

You snatched my heart and went afar.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

Friend, let's go to pick jessamine,
one who dies can never return.
I await your self-earned livelihood.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

Friend, let's go to bring dandelion,
Can the tangle of Fate be resolved?
Heartless guys heap calumny on me.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

Friend, let's go to gather basil,
he wounded my head with an axe and
sent none to inquire about me.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

Friend, let's go to collect herbs,
cussed people make fun of me.
May their plight also be like mine!
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

My friend, let's ascend to the woods,
people have carried tales to him.
Why should that naive believe these?
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

Friend, let's go down the hill,
ornaments on my ear are for him.
my gold is worth full two *ashrafis**.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

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* Coins of pure gold, which she offers as an inducement.

Wolai vesy gachhavai aabas
duniya chhu nendri ta khaabas
praaraan chhasayo jawaabas!
Walo myaani poshey madano!

CHHA AV MYAENY DAENAI POSH

Mehaa kary tsey kith poshi dasvaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

Bo chhas zameen, tse chhuk asmaanai
seeras tse chhukh sarposh
bo chhasay neamat, tse chhukh mehamaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

Laaeli gàti maṇz tsong zaajaanai
baaley roodus na hosh
tse chhaham shama, bo chhas parvaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

Ratsi-ratsi retakol chhum soraanai
bara maa gachhan achhi posh
kuni hita bulbula yita aki aanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

Bam te zeer chhas soz vaayaanai
vilanày thovtham na hosh
kàm kyah gavayo yemi myaani vaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

Friend, let's go to fetch water
while the world is fast asleep.
I am awaiting a reply from him.
Come, my flower-like Cupid!

ENJOY MY POMEGRANATE BLOSSOMS

I made flower bracelets for your sake,
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

I am the earth and you are the sky,
You are the custodian of my secrets;
I am the delicacy, you are the guest.
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

Laila lit an earthen lamp in darkness:
the poor maiden lost consciousness.
You are the candle, I am the moth.
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

The summer is slipping bit by bit,
may not my *achi posh** wither!
O nightingale! Come on a sly for awhile.
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

I pour my agony through musical notes,
you never listened to my plaints.
Did my warehouse lack anything?
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

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* Achi posh — a wild flower for which no English equivalent is available.

Rangȧ rangȧ thury ȧmy kraalaan baanai
byon-byon kȯrnakh nakoosh
kėnh draayi hael-kael, kėnh jaanaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

*Tsaaerith ȧny mai phȧmba miyaanai**
jaanaana me mo rosh
Habba Khotooni roodum armaanai
chhaav myaeny daenai posh

KAAENSI MAA RAAEVIN SHOOREY PAAN

Tulȧ naar chhum lalavun moorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

Maaely maaji rachhnas qanda kastoorey
dȯda aaesim tani naavaan
suy paan logmaa raah musaafoorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

Maaely maaji rachhnas mola kyah voorey
saasa bȧza tsonzȧ aasam sulȧvaan
me no zaanyov lȯdmut loorey
kaaensi maa raavin shooorey paan

Maaely maaji traaevnas sabqas doorey
okhnan volnam moorey paan
aara rossy tulynam naara tamboorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

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* Fine *pashmina* garments stuffed with down.

The potter dyed his wares in varying hues
and designed them in different shapes.
Some emerged clumsy; others are lovely.
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

I bought for you clothes of finest variety.
My beloved, don't be cross with me.
Habba Khatoon's wishes lie unfulfilled.
Enjoy my pomegranate blossoms.

LET NO ONE LOSE THE JOYS OF YOUTH

I must bear the flame like a flexible shoot,
May no one lose the joys of youth!

My parents fed me on candy and sweets,
and washed my body with lots of milk;
the same self is now a lone, dreary wanderer.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

My parents brought me up with intense love,
rows of maids attended on me,
I knew not the building would fall to dust.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

My parents sent me to a distant school,
the cruel teacher beat me with switches
and raised whales on my flesh.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

Maaely maaji harshaayas yeli doorey
pȧta-pȧta draayam vėsy vanȧvaan
hol gom ȧndri lolȧ taaloorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

Maaely maaji von-nam ḍekabaeḍy koorey
vaaeriv aangana chhiy praaraan
ranga doli aasam rȯpa kȯndoorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

Ba chhsai yeti tai tse chhaham doorey
doshiwai draayei jaani jaan
me no zaanyov lȯdmut loorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

Dai nai diya tai deka nai poorey
vai muts aasyaa kaaensi poshaan
moi chȧv Habba Khotooni ṭoori-ṭoorey
kaaensi maa raaevin shoorey paan

When my parents got me wedded afar,
friends saw me off singing plaintive songs,
while I, a lovelorn lass, was mourning.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

My mother told her "Fortunate" daughter,
'Your in-laws are waiting in the courtyard';
posts of my painted palanquin were silver-coated.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

How fond we were of each other then!
Now you have gone so far away from me;
I knew not I would fall on such bad days.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

If God doesn't will and fate is averse,
how can one feed on a handful of grain?
Habba Khatoon drank brimful of love.
May no one lose the joys of youth!

ARNIMAL

On the uplands near Pattan town, midway between Srinagar and Baramula, trekked a pretty lovelorn Kashmiri woman to her parental house in Palhalan, with a heart bruised by the indifference of her husband, shedding copious tears of blood and murmuring doleful strains full of grief, pathos and poignancy, unique wailing and yearning, an unusual intensity and frustration and a vain but cherished hope of reunion with her husband. The cold winds sweeping the undulating meadows and plateaus from nearby Gulmarg made her conscious that she had been deserted by her beloved in the prime of her youth and would have to bear her suffering alone throughout the rest of her life.

This distressed woman was none else than the celebrated poetess Arnimal. The period was some year in the sixth decade of the 18th century.

On reaching the hamlet of her birth, when she fell into the lap of her mother, the tears of the hapless, forlorn and woebegone woman assumed the shape of a torrent. Her bleak future ruthlessly stared at her and every animate and inanimate object associated with her childhood seemed to echo her heartbeats. Hills and dales, brooks, rivulets and mountains all reverberated her loud wails and subdued sobs.

Literary history thus repeated itself in Kashmir in the second half of the 18th century when, like Habba Khatoon (b. 1541), Arnimal poured out her heart's agony in titillating *lol* lyrics.

According to the *History of Kashmiri Literature*, written by A.K. Rahbar, Arnimal was born in 1738 A.D. and she

passed away in 1778 A.D. However, the reputed scholar Prof. Hajini says that she died in 1800 A.D. Some other researchers have also corroborated the latter's account. She was, so to say, literally snatched away by death from the portals of the 19th century.

As was the common practice during Afghan rule, Arnimal too was married in her childhood to Munshi Bhawani Das Kachru, a renowned Persian poet, scholar and savant. He belonged to a respectable family settled in Rainawari, Srinagar, and held a position of honour in the court of Jumma Khan who was the Afghan governor of Kashmir from 1788 to 1792. Being a talented poet with an elegant style he had endeared himself since his youthful days to Afghan dignitaries and officials and was all along associated with the darbar in some way or the other. His pen name was 'Nikku'. He participated in poetical symposia which earned him laurels, besides high esteem. However, he got proper recognition only at a later stage in his life when Jumma Khan took over as Subedar. Jumma Khan also granted a *jagir* to him. It was Kachru who innovated the genre of Persian writing called Bahar-i-Taveel.

Arnimal was a talented, sensitive and sophisticated girl deeply devoted to her husband. Apparently she was quite happy in the new surroundings and had a carefree time throughout her childhood days before attaining adolescence. But just before flowering into full womanhood she got a feeling that her husband was too preoccupied with his literary and other pursuits to pay proper attention to her. She tried hard to draw him towards her but fate had planned it otherwise. Munshi Bhawani Das, for some unknown reasons, ignored her, tortured her and tormented her.

She continued to make desperate efforts to win his favour. She even received training in music to please him but he did not get attracted towards her. Some old music lovers of Kashmir believe that it was Arnimal who invented the 100-string Santoor for which Kashmir is so famous.

However, this notion is not substantiated by any conclusive evidence. At last Munshi Bhawani Das deserted her. The only choice now for her was to leave her home with a broken heart and return to her parental house in Palhalan village. The short ephemeral phase of conjugal love thus ended with a bang and only poignant remembrances remained with her. It is said that her parents were very considerate to her but all the filial love and care could hardly be any compensation for the most grievous loss suffered by her.

Arnimal excelled in *vatsun*, the genre originally evolved by Habba Khatoon 200 years earlier. Several of her delectable creations are extant. All that she had written has not been retrieved so far. Only about two dozen lyrics have passed to the successive generations by word of mouth. Some songs are published in Prof. J.L. Kaul's book, *Studies in Kashmiri* and in *Kashmiri Lyrics*. A few are found in books on Kashmiri music.* However, a 90-year-old descendant of the Kachru family told this author in an exclusive interview in Srinagar in 1987 that Arnimal had herself also recorded a large number of her poems while she remained separated from her beloved at Palhalan village. After her death these creations were handed over to the old man's ancestors who kept them in safe custody. But in view of the atrocities perpetrated by the Afghans in the closing years of their rule on the civilian population and the consequent risk of damage to the invaluable poems, the Kachrus were obliged to deposit this treasure in a *chah* (a giant dry well five times larger in circumference than an ordinary well and about 400 ft. in depth meant for incarceration of criminals and prisoners-of-war) near the Hari Parbat hill. Incidentally, the well still exists in an almond orchard near the Central Jail, Srinagar. What else is buried in its bosom can be anybody's guess.

Both Habba Khatoon and Arnimal had undergone the

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* See also *Daughters of Vitasta* by Prem Nath Bazaz.

same kind of trauma as a result of separation from their husbands. But there was a vital difference between the two personal tragedies, nevertheless. Habba Khatoon had at least the satisfaction of enjoying conjugal love for six years (from 1574 to 1580) but that was not the case with Arnimal, whose youth saw decay before she had blossomed into a full-grown woman. All her dreams remained unfulfilled. The only hope lay in return of better days but this too did not materialise and the prime of her youth passed in separation. Still she did not blame her beloved but instead prayed to God to grant him happiness.

As years passed by, her passion subsided, unlike that of Habba Khatoon; only the yearning lingered on. She took her despicable life in its stride. That is why all her writings are of the earth, earthy. There is no trace of religion or philosophical fervour, nor even mysticism as that of Lal Ded. She constitutes a class by herself. In terms of sheer effect, her poems are no less heart-rending than those of Habba Khatoon. At some places, she even excels the latter. However, the fact remains that in the case of both the poetesses, their songs come from their hearts and go straight to the heart of the readers. Habba and Arni will remain immortal at least until the last oppressed Kashmiri woman gets emancipated.

It will not be out of place to mention here that some cussed and overzealous literary critics have wrongly attributed one of Arnimal's most pathetic ditties — 'Arni rang gom shraavani hiyey' (a full-bloomed summer jessamine turned as pale as an Arni rose) — to her contemporary, Mahmud Gami (1765-1855). Perhaps the State authorities too will some day wake up to the dire need for thorough and sustained research into the dark phases of her life as very little seems to have been done in this field.

KYAAH VANAYO MÀTI

Kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo,
Yee gom paanas ta tee vanayo.
Laanyun nyaay chhum ta tee vanayo,
Kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

Baagas myaanis baadaam phulayaa,
aadana raevis ta tee vanayo,
kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

Baagas myaanis tsera phulayaa,
veri chaani phojmaa ta tee vanayo,
kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

Baagas myaanis gilaasa phulayaa,
dilaasa dit-tham ta tee vanayo,
kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

Baagas myaanis ṭanga phulayaa,
lanji-lanji phojsaa ta tee vanayo,
kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

Baagas myaanis aalicha phulayaa
lolaechi karitham ta tee vanayo,
kyaah vanayo màti kyaah vanayo.

TSOLUMAY YAAR VESI

Yaany hoori me toori tsandun molumay,
taamath tsolmay yaar vesi.

CAN I TELL YOU, LOVE, CAN I?

Can I tell you, Love, can I?
Can I tell you what I suffer?
I suffer the 'abysmal anguish' of Fate;
can I find utterance for my grief?
Can I tell you, Love, can I?

In the garden (of my heart) hardly had the
almond tree (of love) blossomed out
when death 'parted me from caress of Love',
and the blossom of love was lost for ever.
Can I tell you, Love, can I?

In the garden (of my heart) did the apricot-tree
(of love) blossom out tended and watered
by you? Can I tell you, Love, can I?

Did the cherry (of love) blossom out fondly
caressed by you?
Can I tell you, Love, can I?

Did the pear-tree (of love) blossom out in
flambeaux of bloom?
Can I tell you, Love, can I?

In the garden (of my heart) the plum (of love)
was in a flush of bloom, when Fate mocked
at me (and you were gone for ever),
and a blight befell the bloom of love.
Can I tell you, Love, can I?

I BATHED IN SANDAL-OIL

Hardly had I, a budding houri,
bathed me in sandal-oil,
when Love did flee from me, O friend.

Dapyom aagas bo roshi zaagas,
laagas bo sheri hee,
vòndakis baagas poshaah pholumay
taamath tsolumay yaar vesi.

ARNI RANG GOM SHRAAVANI HIYEY

Arni ràng gom shraavani ḥiyey,
kar yiyey darshun diyey.

Shamasòndary paaman laaejis,
aamataavav kotaah gaaejis,
naama-paegaam tas kus niyey,
kar yiyey darshun diyey.

Kànda naabada aaraadamutuy,
phànda karith tsolum kotuy,
khànda karinam lookan thiyey,
kar yiyey darshun diyey.

Suli vothav sangarmaalan,
lala chhaaron kohan ta baalan,
praaraan chhas bo tahinzi ziyey,
kar yiyey darshun diyey.

HATSI LOMNAM

Hàtsi lomnam nendari hàtsi màtsi,
màchhi màchhaband sànith gom.
Son nyoonam ràtsi-ràtsi,
vunyoob karith gom,
vanta vesy vòny kus kas patsi.

Methought I would lie in wait for my lord,
with jessamine to crown his head —
in the garden of my heart,
a rare flower had bloomed
when Love did flee from me, O friend.

I WAS A FULL-BLOWN JESSAMINE

I was a full-blown jessamine: pining for love,
I turned as black as the arni rose;
When will my love come to me?

He exposed me to people's taunts and
scorched me with the burns of love;
who can tell him what I feel?
And will he come to me?

I offered him sugar-loaf and candy sweets,
he enticed my heart and fled. O whither
is he gone? In the presence of strangers
he mocked at me.
And will he come to me?

Let us arise while it is early dawn,
and seek my love on hills and mountains high,
I wait expectantly for him.
When will he come to me?

HE PULLED ME BY THE WRIST

He pulled me by the wrist in my sleep.
And my bracelet pierced my arm.
He robbed me of all my gold
and left me distraught and wild.
Say friend, whom can one trust?

RAATAS OSUM LAERITH

Raatas osum lava zan laerith,
subahas pravi ketha traaevith gom,
babri tsaman ashi saganaavith,
aeshimot kava pashinaavith gom.
Savaal karitos hiye gachhi chaavith.

AALAV DEETOSAY

Me shoka yaarasindi barimas pyaalata
aalav deetosey.

Taravaeni maragey vasavaeni baalata
aahiy neetosey,
kyaah kara neeyinam haranani chhaalata
aalav deetosey.

Kanda tai naabada baerimas thaalata
ranga ranga neetosey,
jod gav aashikan dod ketha tsaalata
aalav deetosey.

KAHANDI BO ZAAYAS

Vuchhta vesy kahandi bo zaayes,
baagani aayes kahandi taam.

Doha aki maely-maaji nagra harshaayes,
shaaharich aesis vaetsis gaam,
sati dohy pheerith maalinev anyaayes,
baagani aayes kahandi taam.

ALL NIGHT HE WAS WITH ME

All night he was with me, like dew
on a flower; the sun rose in the morning
and he fled. And since my wanton love is
fled, leaving me woebegone, I have
watered my basil breasts with tears; will
he not come and enjoy my jessamine body?

GO AND CALL OUT TO HIM

For the love of my sweetheart I filled wine cups,
Go and call out to him.

Across meadows and down hillsides, my tender
thoughts
attend him! Like a deer he bounded away, ah
me!
Go and call out to him.

Dishes of sugar-loaf and candy sweet I filled,
many and various — pray, offer these to him.
Smitten am I — how can I endure the anguish
of love. Go and call out to him.

WHERE WAS I BORN?

See friend, where I was born and
where I was married!

My parents celebrated my marriage in the city
with great *eclat*: city born and bred,
into the country I was married; but widowed
only seven days after, my parents had to call
me back. See friend, where I was married!

Doha akị shreha-saan maalyun gayaayes,
ḍeka-baji kaakani ditsnam paam,
ḍeka-raech zevanuy kona moyaayes,
baagani aayes kahandi taam.

ADA KAR YIYAM TAI

Ada kar yiyam tai,
barasai malarev malarev,
chayinaa sanaa mas
chaavinaa sanaa mas.

Kami sòni haaevnas tàn
kaely hai vuhuvnam
paeṭh sangaran.

Hàli chhus khanjar tai
teer hai laeynam
poshi pànjiran.

PADMAANI KAR YIYAM

Padmaani ada kar yiyam tai,
vadanas chhum na chhen,
òsh chhas traavaan tsaali-tsaali,
màshi kar chham trahan,
làshi naara zaajnas,
myoolum òsh ta àn.

Once I went to my father's home,
there my brother's wife taunted me
so bitterly that widowed as I was, I wished
I had died as soon as I was born.
See friend, where I was married!

WILL HE COME AT ALL

When will my love come to me?
I will fill pitcher on pitcher with wine:
will he not drink to me?
Will he not let me drink to him?

Up on the hill-side the other day,
he spoke harsh words to me — On whom has he
set his eyes? Whose beauty has bewitched his heart?

He has shot countless darts of love
at my frail flowery breasts;
will he not come to me?

WHEN WILL HE COME TO PADMAANI

A Padmaani* am I, yearning for Love, when will
he come to me? My tears flow fast, my longing
is keen, my anguish is deep; and can I ever
forget? My love is a torch-wood flame burning
my inmost bosom with its fiery leaping tongues.
My sorrow knows no end,
my tears know no break.

---

* A woman excelling in charm and character.

AADANBAAJI MYAANI YAARO VEY

Haa volo mony ho vandaya paadan,
aadanbaaji myaani yaaro vey.

Aadana aesis renzala naadan,
yaavanas qadr no zaeniy me,
ditamo darshun chham tsaany laadan,
aadanbaaji myaani yaaro vey.

Kukili peery kava traavith kolaraadan,
dukali vonda myon gav,
me kàli tsaani braenty gaem naadan,
aadanbaaji myaani yaaro vey.

Tsaento ladaery posh pholy kolaraadan,
az chhum aadan vaatihamai,
dihamai darshun sar vandai paadan,
aadanbaaji myaani yaaro vey.

VUZAMALA ZAN DRAAV

Chamakaan obratala vuzamala zan draav,
aayi-graayi chhaayigaty karaan zan aav.

Ḍothaphol kitha rood nabanaar baraan,
gagaraayi karaan tsol zan vaav,
nehachhaṭi anigaṭi mushnas shaaman,
me baali thovnam suy aamataav.

O, MY CHILDHOOD FRIEND

I will lay the very apples of my eyes at thy feet,
O come! My love, companion of my youth!

When young I played with trinkets,
fool that I was, and did not prize my youth;
but now I pine for thee.
Show thyself, my love, companion of my youth!

Like the *kukil*-dove thou didst move along
the wandering rills,
and distraction filled my heart;
beguiled by love, I fancied thou were calling me.
My love, companion of my youth!

Think of *ladarposh* bloom along the rivulet banks
— this is the time I look for thee.
Wert thou to come and show thyself,
I would lay down my life for thee.
My love, companion of my youth!

HE SHONE LIKE LIGHTNING

He shone forth like lightning from under the clouds;
he came and went and came and went away.

He came like hailstone raining down the rage of the skies.
And he went thundering by as the storm sweeps.
amid the "torrent of darkness" he left me,
young in years, to suffer the agony of love.

GAEN GAEN MO KAR YENDARO

Gaen gaen mo kar yendaro,
kanaren phalilay malayo.

Rabi tala kaer tul haa sombulo,
yemberzal pyaala heth praaraan chhai,
hiya-ther chhas tai doobaara pholayo?

YAARO LOL HO AAM CHONUY

Kaava rang kortham haavu deedaaro,
yaaro lol ho aam chonuy.

Chhaanḍaan loosaes gaama-shahaaro,
ḍechhaam saeriy tsei hyuh na kaanh,
tàni tòph laaeytham guli-bombooro,
yaaro lol ho aam chonuy.

AASHO VEY

Aashaavandanhindi aasho vey,
gaṭi manza haavtam gaasho vey.

Laasan gomo raasho vey,
praaraan chhasayo aasho vey,
myatran hunduy byolaa vavy-ze,
shathran ti karyzina naasho vey.

DO NOT MURMUR, O SPINNING WHEEL

Do not murmur and grumble. O Spinning Wheel,
your straw-rings I shall oil.

Raise your head from under the earth, O Hyacinth!
Narcissus is looking for you with cups of wine.
Once faded, will the jessamine bloom again?

LOVE, I YEARN FOR YOU

You have turned me black as the raven, come and show
yourself to me. Love, I yearn for you.

Weary I grew, looking for you 'mid country and
town. I have found none like you.
You have stung me, O wasp-bee;
O come, I yearn for you.

HOPE OF THE HOPEFUL

O, you hope of the hopeful,
in mid-darkness show me the light.

To far-off Lhasa he has gone for gain; expectant
I wait: O bring him back safe to me!
Sow you the seed of friendship for me everywhere,
And slay not even my enemies.

BAALI RAAH KYAAH CHHUMAI

Zaar vantas haa vesi,
baali raah kyaah chhumai.

Aararòst gachhit roodum nishi parzen,
naar gondanam yena boozum nishi parzen
chhumai.
Tanahai vesi tami daadi chhumna pakaan àn,
me chhu tamanaa baali tahund,
nishi yaar gochhumai.

VOD AMI KUKILE

Vod ami kukile dil myon doduy,
haa kamyoo rindy booz myon ku koo koo.

Laeli ta Majnoony nardas ginduy,
trovun shesh-panj pyos dukhaal,
Laeli hund haavasa daavas loguy,
vuchh ta vesi yaar myon tsoluy.
Yaar dai seṭhaah molaluy chhum,
rachaam naala ta vuchhnam holuy.

CHHOLUM TA CHHOKUM

Vanta kavai doori roodum,
yaany me molum toori tsandun,
dòby-vaana chholum ta chhokum,
krooṭh pyom yaara dod,
chhala-chhok naahaqai raavim.

WHAT IS MY SIN

Convey to him my lamentation, friend!
what is my sin?

The cruel one sports with my rivals;
and envy burns my bosom.
O the pain it gives me!
I cannot eat nor drink.
I deeply yearn for Love;
would that he were beside me!

THE TURTLE-DOVE WAILED

The *kukil* (turtle dove) wailed:
Out of the fulness of love's agony I sang,
the Reckless One heard my ku-koo-koo
but did not care.

Laila and Majnun played at dice —
she threw six-and-five but scored only a two.
She had staked her heart — and he won.
See, friend, my love has fled; I hold him
dear, so dear; I would embrace him
but he looked askance at me.

I WASHED MY CLOTHES

Say friend, why he kept away, when I,
a budding maiden, had bathed me in sandal-oil?
At the wash-house, I washed and rinsed my clothes.
See how pitiless and cruel he was!
He did not come. And all the washing
and rinsing was in vain.

MYON HYOO KAS GAV

As mai vesy myon hyoo kas gav,
yes gav masvali gondur havaey,
robakhaana bihithiy dareechas ṭhas gom,
zonum sui maa aangan tsaav,
yaar nai ḍyooṭhum vaelinji tsas gom.

WHO HAS SUFFERED LIKE ME?

Do no laugh at me, friend.
Who has been so miserable as I?
Drunk with the sensuousness of youth and
in my very prime, I have been deserted by
my Love, who is mad on someone else.
Waiting for him in the front parlour,
I heard a tapping at the window-pane,
Methought my Love had entered my courtyard;
it was not he, and my heart within me sank.

Translations by Prof. J.L. Kaul

(*Courtesy: Kashmiri Lyrics*)

RASUL MIR

Rasul Mir (d. 1870) was the prince of melodious songsters of Kashmir. Like Mahmud Gami, he too dominated the literary scene during his time. His special fields were ghazal and *vatsun*. In his ghazals particularly, he brought about a unity of impression not found earlier. Passion, spontaneity, melody and rhythm distinguished his work. He was frankly sensuous.

BAAL MARAEYO

Ba ti no doorer chon zàray,
baal màraeyo màraeyo.

Chhiham khafaa laaray pàta,
laayay bronṭha naalas thàph,
daamaana ràtay mahsharay,
baal màraeyo ...

Sharmanda thaaevthas aaftaabo,
kaaratikich zoon,
kàjy chaani gàjis làjsaa dàray,
baal màraeyo ...

Haaerinji bumba chaany,
laayaan ruma-rumay teer,
vaalinji kàry-nam panjiray,
baal màraeyo ...

I SHALL DIE YOUNG

I cannot bear your separation,
Being a maiden, I shall die young.

You are angry with me; I shall
pursue you and hold the scruff of
your neck. On Judgment Day too,
I shall catch fast your robe.

O Sun! You have put me to shame.
I am the moon of Kartik month;
your love has benumbed me.
I fondly yearn to see your face.

Your bended bows are constantly
piercing my heart with darts,
and turning it into a lattice
full of numerous holes.

Ba sharmi gajis shàr me gom,
kàr me zonum haay,
àz kòr me karmalon sàray,
baal màraeyo ...

Yeth lolabaagas zakhmi dil gul,
sarva chhu myon aah,
àshivaani saety jòyi phiray,
baal màraeyo....

Hesa vesaraavthas maaramatyo,
vesa kàmoo chhay,
tima chhaa myaani khòta sòndaray,
baal màraeyo....

BEDARDA DAADI CHAANI

Bedarda daadi chaani soor ho sapadaan,
soy lai maṭhayo myaani yaaro lo.

Silaah ganjaam, aalam chhanjaam,
ganjaam seena sipaaro,
har taari àshkaeni me soz voyuy,
suy soz moṭhuyo myaani yaaro lo.

Majnoon khàtsaav Najdaeke baalo,
traavaan àshiney tsaalo,
Laely ho aayisai sòrma ta saazo,
thòd vothoo myaani maharaazo lo.

My modesty, and my fate, prevented
me for long from realising
how disgraceful it is to suffer
the pain of unrequited love.

In the garden of love, roses
represent my wounds; the
cypress has grown out of my sighs.
I shall fill brooks with tears.

My love! You have dazed me
into a stupor. Who are your
new-found friends? And
are they more pretty than me?

THE FIRE OF YOUR LOVE

O ruthless one! The fire of your
love is pounding me into ashes.
You seem to have forgotten that
very, old bond of affection.

I wore a breastplate and arms;
wandered around the world in vain.
I played on all strings of my love,
you are indifferent to these tunes.

Majnoon sprawled on the peak of
Najd, shedding copious tears. A
voice he heard: "Get up, my groom!
Your Laila has come fully adorned."

PARMANAND

The devotional era in Kashmiri literature dawned in the first half of the nineteenth century. Also called the Lila Movement, it was founded by Prakash Ram (b. 1819). It represented the Bhakti tradition set by Parmanand (b. 1794) and Lachman Raina 'Bulbul' (b. 1812), besides Prakash Ram himself. These poets followed the Rama-Krishna canon of Hindu mythology. Two other poets, Krishna Joo Razdan (1850-1925) and Thakur Manavati (1850-1923), later joined the movement.

Lila poems depict the amorous play of Lord Krishna. The term 'lila' is also used for devotional poems in general. Lilas are similar in form to the *doha* of Hindi verse, especially that of Kabir. In these poems Persian has sometimes been mixed with Kashmiri.

Parmanand (1794-1879) was a towering literary figure and a great devotee of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. Born at Seer village in Anantnag district during the Pathan rule when Persian was the court language, he first started writing in Persian and then switched over to Kashmiri. He composed three long narrative poems of devotional nature, besides writing a large number of *bhajans* and *lilas*. His narrative poems are Shiv Lagan, Radha Swayamvar and Sudama Charit. His work is thoroughly permeated with the teachings of Kashmir Shaivism.

Parmanand also wrote litanies addressed to Hindu gods and goddesses such as Vishnu, Shiva, Parvati and Ganesh. They contain four *pads*, the last one providing the refrain. Some also have rhyming couplets. He also composed poems on yogic practices and mystic symbolism. His most

remarkable poem in the last category above is "Karambhumika: the seeds of contentment will blossom into the fruit of ecstasy". This poem provides an inanimate picture of rural Kashmir of that time. In this didactic piece he aims at preparing a *sadhak* for the purification of soul necessary for the attainment of *gyaan*. The introductory stanza says:

> Reinforce thy field of action with the spirit of duty and devotion; the seeds of contentment will then grow to bear the fruit of Eternal Bliss. Harness the oxen of twin-breath to plough the field day and night; lash them on to work hard with the *kumbaka* whip. Arise, awake and endeavour to see that no patch remains unploughed.
>
> Tr. by P.N. Razdan

The whole poem is full of symbols like "the yoke of love", "block of patience", "moisture of malice", "wet sods of contemplation", "water of *tapa*", "sickle of renunciation", "logs of meditation" and "thine own Karma is the store of thy Fate (*prarabdha*)."

Quite a few of his *lilas* are difficult to interpret at places due to the mystical allusions to "lotus", "chakra" and "mandala". Parmanand used to recite his *lilas* to the accompaniment of *madham*, a stringed musical instrument, just as Kabir recited his *dohas*.

Parmanand believes that repentance will not help the wrongdoer. See how beautifully he expresses this truth in the following couplet:

> What I sowed, grain by grain,
> shall I reap, ear by ear.

Emphasising the great importance of Bhakti which culminates in man's elevation to godhood, he says:

Blessed is he who is experienced:
Devoid of light, what use is
a lamp to the blind, in darkness?
Only he sees, whom He asks to
open his eyes!

***

Having found the pearly necklace
of Bhakti,
free you are to wear it!
Who forbids you? Who
approves it?
You are all in all,
You are all in all.

AARAS MANZ ACHAVAEY

Aaras manz atsavaey,
vigini zàn natsavaey.

Laagos posh poozey,
Krishna Joo nendari vuzey,
voparas kas patsavaey....

Laejhas tani tanay,
shaehalekh hani-hanay,
kamov premav hatsavaey,...

Vànas manz nana-vaarey,
chhaaraan Krishna pyaarey,
kanev taapav tatsavaey ...

Pompur shamahas pàth,
taran kyaah chhu karan gath,
matis path kàr màtsavaey ...

WE SHALL ENTER THE RING

We shall enter the ring and dance with Lord Krishna like nymphs with gusto.

We will worship Him by offering various kinds of flowers so that He may wake up from sleep. We have got faith only in Krishna; not in any stranger.

Maidens deep in love embraced him passionately. Every limb of theirs is now cool and refreshed. "What a divine love have we seen!" they say to themselves.

Gopis rushed to the forest barefooted in search of their beloved Krishna. They were not daunted by the hot sun or the heated boulders.

The moth hovers round the candle and is ultimately consumed by the flame. The maidens too have a rare opportunity of going mad with love.

Ashikani mòkhta haaran,
chhe ladaan mòkhta haaran,
tooly-tooly zàn ràtsavaey ...

Yi pad khaah chhu vanun krooṭh,
su parmaanand kàmy ḍyooṭh,
vuchhith vònumut katsaavaey ...

They shed copious tears resembling pearls. They make garlands of these pearls, each of which is equal in weight to a fine *rati*.

It is very difficult to disclose the secret of love. Many devouts have not experienced Divine Bliss. From among those, who have known it, there are very few who have expressed it openly.

PRAKASH RAM

Prakash Ram (1819-1885), founder of the Lila Movement, composed some long narrative *lila* poems, besides writing the *masnavi* 'Akanandun'. This immortal ballad is the Kashmiri version of the Isaac and Abraham story. Akanandun literally means 'the only son'. However, his greatest contribution to Kashmiri literature is his translation of the Ramayana. He rendered it in 1847 under the title of 'Ramavtar-Charit'. He provided a typical Kashmiri milieu and landscape for the epic by showing Sita wearing a *pheran* (long gown) and *taranga* (headgear of Kashmiri Pandit woman). He delineated the Dandak forest as full of *deodar*, pine and poplar trees.

AAV BAHAAR BOLU BULBULO

Aav bahaar bolu bulbulo,
sone vòlo baravo shaedi,

Draav kaṭhkòsh gròza paan chhalo,
zara chalanay vandaky daedi,
vuzu nendarey vuni chhaa sulo ...

Kaav kumri vuchhu poshinoolo,
aay naalaan zàn phariyaedi,
baav vòndaki gham-gosa gulo ...

Naav hiyi tan neru sòmbulo,
heth zameenas khàti aazaedi,
pyaala heth chhay yemberzalo ...

THE ADVENT OF SPRING

O bulbul, sing; the spring is here.
Come to ours for a celebration.

Frost has vanished. Cleanse your body
with a bath and also wash away the
ailments of winter. Awake, arise!
How long will you keep sleeping?

The crow, the dove, the golden oriole
have filled the air with their wails.
O rose! You too relate to us your
plaints, hardships and sorrows.

O hyacinth! Spread the message
of freedom for our land. The
narcissus is waiting with its cup.

Tsaav soṇth tay nab gav khulo,
butaraets paeṭh chàli phasaedi,
tekabataney ta virikim phòlo ...

Naav tan man traav zalzalo,
draav shihul pony kami naagaraadi,
khasoo Parbath ta vasoo Tulamulo ...

The sky is clear with the advent
of spring. The winter wranglings
are gone. The daffodils and
meadow-saffrons are in blossom.

Let us clean our minds of
all kinds of fear. Fresh waters
again flow out of springs. Let us
visit Parbat and Tulamula shrines.

KRISHNA RAZDAN

Krishna Joo Razdan (1850-1925) was the most famous Kashmiri Bhakti poet who wrote delectable *bhajans* in the *lila* form in praise of Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna. Among his impressive works are *Shiv Lagan*, *Shiv Parinay* and *Harihar Kalyan*. He introduced realism in both language and narrative and was meticulous in the choice of words. He favoured *bhoga* (indulgence) as against *tyaga* (renunciation).

AARA KARIVEY AARAY

Nandalal aav gindane raas,
aara karivey aaray.

Aaraval dàz lolanaaray,
aaravali kòr vanvaas,
aaraval pheer aara-aaray ...

Dihi-daarikaayi maṇz vaaray,
vuchhvey khelavun raas,
daari mutsarith nav daaray ...

Karivi sòndar naaray,
ròhv karanuk abyaas,
Shamasòndar bozi vaaray ...

COME AND JOIN THE RING

Nand Lal is to perform Raasa,
O Gopis! Join the ring.

Fire of love consumed the wild rose,
it took recourse to the woods
and sauntered from brook to brook in
search of the beloved. Join the ring.

Look! Dance is in full steam
in the mansion-shaped body,
with all its nine windows ajar.
Come and join the ring.

O beautiful maidens! Practise
the art of 'rohv' dance.
Lord Krishna will enjoy the same.
Come and join the ring.

Laari kyaah yemi samsaaray,
saasan karivey ḍaas,
akh dayinaav taari taaray ...

Krishnas seety lokachaaray,
Krishnajuva kar athavaas,
yi chhu lokachaar dòh taaray....

Nothing from this world will go with us,
let us give every penny in alms.
Only God's name can save us,
Come and join the ring.

O Krishna Joo! Shake hands with
the Lord from your very childhood.
Your youth is a seven-day wonder.
Come and join the ring.

ZINDA KAUL

Zinda Kaul (1884-1966), popularly known as 'Masterji', was one of the most eminent poets produced by Kashmir. His verse collection *Sumran* (Rosary) published in 1955, got the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956 — the first to be received by any Kashmiri litterateur. He himself rendered the poems into English, over which also he had great command.

Zinda Kaul mostly sang of eternal longing. Clarity and confidence are the characteristics of his work. His deep thoughts are always couched in simple diction.

Masterji was a precocious child who studied Persian in a *maktab*. Intellectual maturity had dawned early on him. His poetical career began with Urdu, Persian and Hindi. Later he switched over to Kashmiri. After changing several jobs, he finally came to be appointed as teacher in a college where he got his popular name.

However, early shocks in life were in store for him. His wife died when he was only 38. Sometime later he lost his eldest son also. These incidents drowned him in grief and gloom and he poured out his heart in the shape of some saddest songs. He shut himself in a quiet room. He was essentially a holy man chastened by the vicissitudes of time. The spirit in universe was his joy.

Zinda Kaul was a seeker of truth. He derived little pleasure from his surroundings; there was no communion with the world, so to say.

SUMRAN (ROSARY)

Sumran panun ditsonam premuk nishaana vesiye,
Ratsarun togum na rovum, osum na baana vesiye;
Path kaali chhum na diutmut sòn mokhta daana vesiye.
Ȧny saari kyaah labakh vony tim mokhta daana vesiye.

Listen, my friend! He gave me His rosary as a token of His love, but alas! I failed to take care of it and lost it! I was unworthy. I have no hope to recover those precious beads by groping in my blindness. To be so lucky one must have donated valuable gifts to the poor in one's past lives — which I have not.

Vaelinji manẓ thavun gochh haavun thòvum ȧthas paeṭh,
Raah kas chhu, kòr me paanas nokhsaan paana vesiye.
Haavun chhu raavaraavun, chaavuk samar chhe khaemi,
Thaavaan zi chhaava baapath baanan chhi ṭhaana vesiye.

I ought to have treasured it in my heart but I held it in my hand to make a show of it. So no one else is to blame; I myself am responsible for such grievous loss. To show one's treasure is to lose it; impatience leads to imperfection; people keep lids on their kettles so that the rice may be cooked perfectly.

Yȧna suy nishaana rovum, tȧna maets gaemits ta phalavaa,
Nyun hyòn na kenh ti, pheraan chhas vaana-vaana vesiye;
Vesarun panun vanas kyaa, buth maa samem dohas thi,
Kůny zȧny timan vatan manẓ, gȧtsa kòt shabaana vesiye.

Since I have lost this token, I go, like one out of wits, from shop to shop without meaning to buy or beg anything. (Those who go from faith to faith

grasp none.) How can I explain my lapses, slips and falls? How can I face Him during the day? And I cannot go to Him alone also in the dark, dangerous night.

***

REPLY

Yach pach ma haar; byaakhaa heth yoory vaati kaanchhaa,
Tas chhaa kȧmi nishaanan, bȧry-bȧry khazaana vesiye.
Dolaan kohan vanan manz, sholaan chhi gulshanan manz,
Zotaan chhi taarakan manz, kaetyaah nishaana vesiye.

Dear friend, pray do not lose hope and faith; no wonder if someone comes to you with another love-token. He has no dearth of tokens; His treasures are full. His tokens are lying ungathered in hills and woods, or brightly blooming in flower-beds, or scintillating among the stars.

Vesarith ḍalith pathar peth, buth kyaa dimav tamis nish,
Pȯt pheraniky pakaan chhaa yithy hi bahaana vesiye;
Maanav zi ȧsy hemav pȯt, chhoryaa tasund mohabath,
Paivand yi aadanuk chhaa shüry dostaana vesiye.

You say: "How can we face Him after all our slips and falls?" Such lame excuses to turn back from devotion will not do. For, supposing we withdraw, can His love let us go? The eternal bond (between the human soul and God) is not fragile and flimsy like a child's friendship.

Dil phuti-mataen chhu toshaan, yechh gari-mataen chhu roshaan,
Gȧchh vaeri-mataen Sudaaman, prichh gaayibaana vesiye.
Ȧndy-pȧkhy tati chhu aasaan, bodabror Surdaasun,
Bozaan chhu maay laegith, loliky taraana vesiye.

He loves the humble repentant; though He pretends to be angry with those who are sophisticated. If you don't believe me, go and ask aside His popular devotees like Sudama who had won His love. He, the all-knowing innocent child, is never far from saints like Surdas, and listens quietly to their devotional songs.

Tr. by Zinda Kaul

THE SNOW HAS FALLEN

By Zinda Kaul

The snow, the snow, the purifying snow!
As though a shroud were woven from the moon
to bury inequalities and drown
the hills and valleys, high and low.
Both fair and ugly beauty now possess
beneath this level cover, come to show
that hills and plains are sections of one dress
if we the wearers of the dress could know.

The stranger, kinsman, birth and death, one grace
pervades, if but duality could go!
The snow has fallen, beautiful and fresh,
my candle in the dawn will no more glow!
To see my image in the frozen bush
will He, my Yogi, look beneath the snow?

Tr. by Nilla Cram Cook

MAHJOOR

Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor (1887-1952), the song-bird of Kashmir, is ever immortal in his crooning notes and melodies par excellence. He is the only poet of Kashmir who depicted love, beauty, nature and human foibles as intimately as Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. Even Tagore acknowledged his great poetical acumen. He was an eminent versifier, patriot and humanist and had the unique distinction of achieving unprecedented popularity in his own lifetime. His lyrics are sung with gusto even now — 43 years after his death — by the old and the young alike. He sang with the passion of a moth about the Happy Valley, its lakes and mountains, its fruits, flowers and birds and the woes of its poor and patient people. Delineation of nature in its virgin flavour is Mahjoor's forte. The part played by him in awakening the masses during the freedom struggle is unforgettable. His secular credentials are unquestionable. He is aptly called the poet of New Kashmir.

Though Mahjoor is no more, his call for Hindu-Muslim unity contained in the following verses will never die:

> As Kashmiris you share same land, ethos;
> Don't alienate one another for naught.
>
> Muslims are milk and Hindus sugar;
> Mix milk and sugar in sweet accord.
>
> With Hindus at the helm, Muslims to row;
> Thus will our boat float smoothly.

LOKACHAAR

Baezy karithiy tsòlkha baezygaaro ho
nau bahaaro myaani lòkachaaro ho

Myon yaavun khàsavun haar shraavun
jalva haavun ta aalam tanbalaavun
bosh poshan rood doh taaro ho ...

Myon lòkachaar vanakuy os deodaar
làbi dariyaa chhaavaan taaza sabazaar
màto tsaṭhtam haa tabardaaro ho ...

Myon lòkachaar joshdaar kaayur naar
shola maaraan khooṇkhaar zoraavaar
josh soryom chheta gom naaro ho ...

Myon lòkachaar khaabah os màzadaar
khyom afsoos yaamath gos bedaar
ti ba vuchhina haa beyi doobaro ho ...

Myon lòkachaar baaghuk jaanaavaar
poshi lanji paeṭh bolaan khòsh guftaar
teer mo laay meer sheekaaro ho ...

Myon lòkachaar sholavun os gulzaar
suli phalimàty aasy tàth gul-e-anaar
vaava hardaeni gos lura-paaro ho ...

CHILDHOOD

The magician performed and
His tricks, sweet as the first flush
Of spring, left me spellbound.
The magician then vanished.

Like the rising tide of summer,
The blossoms appeared and
Beguiled the world, but alas!
It was a seven-day wonder.

Spare, ye woodcutter, the
Lofty pine tree, rooted firm
In the river bank's virgin
Verdure, in yon forest.

The threshold of youth was
Imbued with rich, fierce
Tongues of firry flames.
Lo! The cinders turned ashes.

A dream was cut short;
My saddened heart, vacant
Eyes seek the same, nice
Joyful panorama again.

O master-fowler! Pray take
The aim away from that
Lovely bird singing gaily
On the flower-laden bough.

The cold autumnal wind
blew and swept the rosy,
pomegranate-blossomed
Garden into a shambles.

Myon lòkachaar tsàlavun aabi Raenby aar
gav neerith pheerith yun chhu dushvaar
kola raadan dòdh yi sabazaaro ho ...

HAA GULAV

Haa gulav tohi maa sae vuchhvan yaar myon
bulbulav tòhy chhaeriton dildaar myon
vàny divaan poshan prechhum yemberzalan
aav maa tohikun su jodoogaar myon

Daen poshav josha yith vòzlaavy baagh
vàrga zanamas aav loluk naar myon
rosha paaeṭhy yita poshi baaghuk hith kàrith
chaani yina pholi dilbaro gulzaar myon

Tsoori lalavum lola zar tas maa khabar
chhaayi chhaayey zaayi gav amaar myon
hiya poshik paaeṭhy guzaaerim zindagi
lanji aaviji gòb na gav zaanh baar myon

Aash roozim yaar vaatyam àz pagaah
yi karaan soraan aav lòkachaar myon
ulfatuk sodaa kunum gham màly hyòtum
ath tareeqas paeṭh chalyov baapaar myon

MAZHABI ITTIHAAD

Nyaay traaviv maay thaaviv paana-vaeny,
pòz mohabat baegraaviv paana-vaeny.

The Rambi stream wound
Its way, never to return.
The waters gushed down,
Starving the grassy banks.

O ROSES, NIGHTINGALES!

O Roses! You must have seen my love;
O Nightingales! Pray seek him out.
Roving amid flowers I ask the narcissus,
"Didn't that charmer pass by you?"

Pomegranate blossom has splashed the orchard
With crimson hue; my heart's fire is rekindled.
Come slyly to watch the flowers, and
Let bloom my life's garden too.

Unknown to him I bore the flame
Of love; my youth languished;
I pass days like the jessamine that
Encumbers not the tender bough.

My life oozed away hoping that you
Would come today or, haply, tomorrow.
I bartered away love for anguish;
In this way, my trade flourished.

RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Forget your squabbles and love each other,
distribute true amity among yourselves.

Saaf thaaviv seena mashiraaviv fasaad,
keena traaviv daedy baaviv paana-vaeny.

Waqti mushkil hemto-samto kariv,
ȧkh-akis atha shehalaaviv paana-vaeny.

Zaath butraath Kashraen hinz chhav kuni,
khaamakhaa doorer ma paaviv paana-vaeny.

Dȯd chhu Muslim, Huond chhu shakar saaf-saaf,
dȯd ta beyi shakar ralaaviv paana-vaeny.

Hendy raṭan nȧm, khoor vaayan ahli deen,
naav yemi mulkaech chalaaviv paana-vaeny.

Saani vatanuk kus chhu dushman kus chhu dost,
jahal traavith gaenzaraaviv paana-vaeny.

Gaer noksaan kari na tuhindis yazzatas,
yuth na tuhi yazzat haraaviv paana-vaeny.

Ghare tanaazas gaer shoobyaa kath khodaa,
nyaay vataniky ȧnzaraaviv paana-vaeny.

Ȧkh-akis paeṭh yuth-na zaanh kaanchhiv badi,
yuth-na zaanh raaveraaviv paana-vaeny.

Yöd thaviv ȧthavaas, tohi poshavi na kaanh,
chhen karith yina poshinaaviv paana-vaeny.

Paanavany yina ȧkh-akis dushman baniv,
fitna yina zaanh vuzanaaviv paana-vaeny.

Kus dapaan chhu baegraaviv kuly ta posh,
bulbulav gulzaar chhaaviv paana-vaeny.

Baey sund baeyis shoobyaa thaavun malaal,
ganḍ dilan hindy mutsaraaviv paana-vaeny.

Haechenaavyookh rut pakun naadaan baeyi,
ȧkh-akis haemath baḍaaviv paana-vaeny.

Cleanse your hearts, forget your disputes,
shun vengeance, confide in one another.

Show courage and unite in crises,
lend a helping hand to each other.

As Kashmiris you share same land, ethos,
don't alienate one another for naught.

Muslims are milk and Hindus sugar,
mix milk and sugar in sweet accord.

With Hindus at the helm, Muslims to row,
thus will our boat float smoothly.

Shed ignorance and reckon who are
friends and foes of our motherland.

Aliens can't damage your prestige, only
you should not dishonour each other.

Don't invite strangers to mediate in
internal feuds, resolve them yourselves.

Never wish ill to one another, and
never lose each other's goodwill.

No one can harm you if you are united,
don't suffer by tearing yourselves asunder.

Don't become enemies of one another,
never create a chasm among yourselves.

O 'bulbuls'! Don't earmark flowers and
trees; only enjoy the garden as a whole.

Brothers should not get angry with
each other; untie the knots of your hearts.

Teach good conduct to your unwise
brethren, and give them courage.

Yim ghareeb aasan timan àtha-ròt kariv,
baeyi-baeyi chhiva rachharaaviv paana-vaeny.

Milatsaaruk dyut yi Mahjooran sabaq,
yaad thaaviv bozanaaviv paana-vaeny.

GREESY KOOR

Poshavani baaghich posha gòndariyey
greesy koory naazneen sòndariyey
sorgaech Himaaly, Qaafaech pariyey
greesy koory naazneen sòndariyey

Azaad vàna chi posha thariyey
mushka saety toory kàmy bariyey
sàth rang bakhshi kàmy rangaeriyey ...

Saedy-saada jaama chhi shaama sondariyey
na zi chhuy gota, na zariyey
kaatsa zooni chhiy kaala òbriky ṭhaeriyey ...

Neraan pheraan chhakhay shah pariyey
goshan kàr havaa khoriyey
poshan vyoor heth vasi toolariyey ...

Yaa-hoo paraan naeri kotariyey
baghan pheri rànga tsàriyey
naaga sabazaarich bagha bàbariyey ...

Vanavaan draayakh paeṭh thaezariyey
viginev shaabaash kariyey
changa saaz vaayaan chhakhay deedariyey ...

Bring succour to those who may be poor,
remain united in love like brothers.

Mahjoor has given a lesson in unity,
remember it and teach it to one another.

COUNTRY LASS

O shapely, beautiful country
lass! You are like a
bouquet, a fairy on Caucasus
mountain or Himaal in heaven.

O blossomed bough of the open
woodland! Who filled your
buds with scent? Which dyer
bestowed seven hues on you?

You are attired in simple
apparel, sans embroidery or
golden laces. Black tresses
hide your moonlike face.

You go about freely like a
fairy queen. Breathe fresh air
in the woods. Like the bee,
extract pollen from flowers.

Sing 'Ya hoo' like the dove
and cruise over the gardens like
the golden sparrow. You look
ravishing by the spring verdure.*

You come over the highland
trotting, singing hymns and
playing on the harp and
the sitar. Fairies clap you.

---

* As beautiful as the fresh basil.

Tse ta khojabaayan chhaa baraabariyey
tsaey gulan seety dilbariyey
khoja baayi choprith daari ta bariyey ...

Rosha-rosha draayekh baagha andariyey
poshav kàn tsaey maa bariyey
bulbul kàrithak kàly tai zariyey ...

Gaehna kàni posh chhi tàni jàry jàriyey
gàrymaety kàmi zargariyey
paery làgi zi àth kaereegariyey ...

Royas chaenis mah paekariyey
aab va ràng chhuna baazaeriyey
moyas maa chhay phàlylaech tariyey ...

Hàyahaeki aaba chhay chashma bàry-bariyey
gaeratich chhai dilaavariyey
sharmi chaani hoorav taereef kariyey ...

Vàji paeṭh vuchhikh thòd làdith nàriyey
lo lo karaan lolariyey
nàri maa losai tsoor kàry-kariyey ...

Guma haetsa shoobaan buma vanjariyey
chha karaan ghaarath gariyey
haes yina raavi màs malariyey ...

Bul hàvas mai laag gul paekariyey
aaluts yuth na aavariyey
chika chaav pana nuy yina raavariyey ...

City dames can't equal you
while they shut themselves up
in their apartments; you alone
are friendly with the flowers.

You rushed through the garden
slyly. Did the flowers poison
your ears? You have made
the 'bulbuls' deaf and dumb.

Your body is bedecked with
fine, flowery ornaments.
Which goldsmith made these?
What a lovely handiwork!

O moon-bodied one! Your face
doesn't have a synthetic hue,
your forehead is wet even
without scent or perfume.

Your eyes are filled with water
of modesty and your pride is good
enough to make you brave. Even
fairies praise your coyness.

With sleeves upturned, you
are seen tending the field
with an implement. I hope
your hands haven't got tired.

Your eyebrows, full of sweat,
look beautiful and rob one
of his heart. O wine jar,
beware! Don't lose your wits.

O rose-bodied one! Don't be
sensuous and let inertia
not overwhelm you. Don't
show off lest you be lost.

WALO HAA BAGH WAANO

*Walo haa baghwano nav ahaaruk shaan
paida kar
pholan gul gath karan bulbul tithi saamaan
paida kar*

*Chaman vaeraan rivaan shȧbnam ratith jhaamai
pareshaan gul
gulan tai bulbulan andar dubaarai jaan
paida kar*

*Ma thav gulzaaras ȧndar soy gulan kicht soy
kharaai chhay
yivaan sȯmbul chhi pai dar pai gulay khandaan
paida kar*

*Muhhabat pȧnani vatanuk poorȧ aasun
shoobi insaanas
tse yi maan mȧnzilas vaatakh yuthuy yimaaan
paida kar*

*Kari kus bulbula aazaad panjras manz tsa
naalaan chhukh
tse pananay dȧsta pȧnanyan mushkilan aasaan
paida kar*

*Hakoomath maal-o-daulat naaz-o-neamat beyi
shahanshaahi
yi soruy chhuy tse nishi paanas tse amichi
zaan paida kar*

*Chhi baaghas jaanavaar bolaan magar aavaaz
chhakh byȯn-byȯn
yihendis aalavas yaarab assar yeksaan
paida kar*

ARISE, O GARDENER!

Arise, O Gardener! And usher in
the glory of a new spring.
Create conditions for 'bulbuls' to
hover over full-blown roses.

Dew bemoans the garden's
desolation. Harassed roses have
torn their garments. Infuse
new life into flowers and 'bulbuls'.

Root out stinging nettle from
the garden; it will harm flowers.
Wave after wave of hyacinths
are coming; let them laugh.

Total immersion in the love of
the motherland behoves man.
If you create this faith, surely
you shall attain the goal.

Who will free you, O 'bulbul',
while you bewail in the cage?
With your own hands, work out
your own salvation.

Power and pelf, bounties
and royal grandeur are all
within your reach and grasp.
Only you have to identify them.

In the garden many birds sing
but their notes are varied.
May God harmonise these
into one effective melody!

Agar vuzanaavehan basti gulàn hinz traav
zeer-o-bàm
bunyul kar vaav kar gagaraay kar toofaan
paida kar

Dubaara aalamas Kaeshraen hund naav
gatsi roshan
tsa Laltaadit ta Taezi Bhat, Mubaarak Khan
paida kar

Pàkan farmaani shaahi az ti beyi chaanen
ishaaran paeṭh
tsa yeth pànanis zamaanas maṇz doyum Zia Bhan
paida kar

Kàran sar khàm tsai kun ahley adab
Iran-o-Shiraaziky
Ghani hue byaakh kaanh jaadoo bayaan insaan
paida kar

If you must awaken this rosy
habitat, give up the harp.
Bring about earthquakes and
thunder, raise a tempest!

Kashmiris' fame will again
spread in the world if you
create luminaries like Tazi Bhat,
Lalitaditya and Mubarak Khan.*

Official writs will again run
at your will in case you
produce a peer of Zia Bhan
in this modern age.

Litterateurs of Iran will bow
to you in reverence if you
create a poet with powers of
magical narration like Ghani.**

---

* The famous king Lalitaditya of Kashmir (A.D. 725 to 763) conquered the whole of India, Afghanistan, Turkistan and Tibet.

Tazi Bhat was a famed general who defeated the Governor of Punjab, Tatar Khan, near Sialkot in A.D. 1480 and brought Punjab under Kashmir's occupation.

Syed Mubarak Khan Behaqi, famous general who warded off several attacks on Kashmir by Mughal King Akbar.

** Ghani was the most eminent Persian poet of Kashmir who lived in the 17th century. An Iranian poet, Mirza Ali Shah, unable to understand the meaning of his famous couplet — in which he had intermingled both Persian and Kashmiri words — and acknowledging his great calibre, travelled all the way to Kashmir to meet him.

The couplet reads as follows: *"Moyi miyaani tu shudah kraala pan, karda juda kaasaye sar ra ze tan."* (Meaning: Like the potter's thread, your tresses made me dazed and senseless, severing the head (pot) from the body (lump of clay).

NOVUY DUNIYA

Novuy gul tai novuy bulbul novuy gulzaar
aasun gòchh
novuy màs tai novuy saqi novuy paimaana
aasun gòchh

Naviy butaraath nov asmaan novuy rav tai
novuy partav
novuy subahaa novuy shaamaa novuy samsaar
aasun gòchh

Kitaabi mazhabuk milatsaar zevi hund qoul
gav praanaan
dilan àndar novuy lolah novuy samatsaar
aasun gòchh

Vòni kotaah kaal kàmzoran kàran paamaal
zoraavar
yiman kàmzor insaanan ti dil hushyaar
aasun gòchh

Dohas zuv jaan tsaṭith shaamas àḍiy tsòt
chhum divaan maalik
kàmas raezi ba su ti myaenis ghàmas tàn daar
aasun gòchh

Gariban kyut chhu yek anaar va sad bemaar
mushkila saan
dapaan zàrdaar àkh bemaar hàth anaar
aasun gòchh

A NEW WORLD ORDER

I crave for a new rose, new
Nightingale, new garden;
A new wine, new cup-bearer
And a new intoxication!

I seek a new earth, new sky,
A new sun, new sunshine,
A new dawn, new dusk,
In short, a new, just world!

We only pay lip-service
To the concept of secularism.
Why not ingrain in our hearts
A new sense of love and unity!

How long will the tyrants
Trample the weaklings' rights?
A new awakening may be born
In the hearts of the downtrodden!

After day-long toil, I have to
Contend with the half-meal
The master doles out. He should
Have awakened to my plight.

A hundred poor and sick must
Share only one pomegranate;
For the rich, it is a hundred
Fruits to one ailing man!

AZAEDI TA TAQSEEMI HINDUSTAN

Sanaa saeri pariv saanen gharan manz tsaai azaedi
setha yetskaaly asi kun jalva haavaan aayi azaedi

Yi azaedi godaeny yeli draayi nány Hindustanas manz
lachhav paethy aayi insaanan ladaan tila kraayi azaedi

Garibi muflisi bebooj, seety heth khaana vaeraani
ami ritsi traayi asi paeth aayi traavaan saayi azaedi

Yi azaedi chha kókrah jaan, sóna saend thool kenh traavaan
timay kenh thool heth vóny beethmits beyi praayi azaedi

Yi azaedi chha sórgich hoor phaeryaa khana páta khaanai
faqath kentsan gharan andar chhe maaraan graayi azaedi

Yi azaedi dapaan sarmaayidaeri chha na kuni thaavany
vóny pánanyan nishi chha sómbaraavun hevaan sarmaayi azaedi

Lukan maatam gharan ándar bihit maharaaza hi haaekim
yimav rátmits chha paanas saety khálwat shaayi azaedi

Gareeban vaarasi kárahan magar chhe na haaekiman fursath
timov laeb motoran ándar dávaan thadi paayi azaedi

FREEDOM AND PARTITION

God be thanked that freedom
Hath dawned after centuries.
And our homes and hearths
Feel its sparkling impact.

Before the four corners of India
Were bathing in the sunshine of
Independence, lakhs were pushed
Into the cauldron of hatred.

Alas! Freedom brought in its wake
Nothing but a long shadow of
Anarchy, poverty, deprivation
And sad, divided households.

Independence is like the hen
That layeth few golden eggs.
But this queen-rooster hath
Taken too long to hatch them.

Freedom is like a coquettish
Fairy from the high heavens.
Naturally, it condescends to
Stroll into houses of chosen few.

Freedom was supposed to end
Capitalism but it hath, instead,
Resulted in capital formation,
Favouring only the near and dear.

Rulers frolic like bridegrooms
While the people are in mourning!
Freedom hath blessed them with
The ivory castles of solitude.

Ministers are busy riding
Their newly acquired cars.
How can they find time to
Heal the wounds of the poor!

VITASTA

O Vitasta![1] Whither do you
Go meandering in quietude?
I shall offer flowers at your feet.

Like a fairy, you pass under
The cyprus trees, at times slowly,
Quickly, overtly or covertly.

Vishav[2] descends with the Water
Of Life and steeped in the wine
Of love, it races towards you.

Rambi-Aar[3] roars down the woods
Sparing banks nor moorings.
On attaining to you, it dozes off.

(*Courtesy*: *Poems of Mahjoor*)

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1 The original Sanskrit name of the river Jhelum.
2 Vishav (or Vishnu) is a tributary of the Jhelum originating from Kaunsar (Kausar) Nag.
3 Rambi-Aar, a hillstream flowing through south-western Kashmir and another tributary of the Jhelum. When swollen, it spells destruction to villages falling in its path.

DINA NATH NADIM

Dina Nath Nadim (1916-1988) was the most prominent progressive poet of Kashmir. Influenced by Marx, Iqbal and Chakbast during the thirties, he started writing in Urdu and Hindi but later switched over to Kashmiri in 1942. He was the first poet to free the Kashmiri language from the shackles of foreign influence and restore it to its pristine glory. His diction is simple, pure and refined.

Nadim introduced several new genres into Kashmiri poetry such as blank verse, sonnet and opera. A crusader for the cause of the downtrodden, he wrote mostly about the common man. His opera *Bombur Yamberzal* received the Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1970 and was staged on that occasion in the former USSR. In 1976 he was awarded the Honorary Fellowship of the Jammu and Kashmir Cultural Academy. His poetry collection *Shihil Kuly* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987.

BAARAAN COAT

Kamras manz tsaaas
te baaraan coat kodum naala
avezaan trovum coate kilis paeṭh
hange-mange phyurus pȯt
te yaḍ barith nazrah kaermas
baasyom zan chhus baeyi
ath coate kilis paeṭh avezaan gomut
phaeky ti timay, nȧri zaechhy timay,
beyi shaane timay,
su qaamath zeeṭham zyooṭh,
te naaluk aare ti suy
baṭnan heri-bona kaaje ki drasa seeti
p̄aeny hew dalimaty
vuchhit kormas heri-bon pokhta
te bar mutserith draas paane nebar,
draas paane nebar, ami thaana nebar,
aivaane nebar, dookaane nebar.

Kam taam zȧni jorah aakh
prutsehak
"Hey, tas jannat gaarun
tohi maa yeti kaanh baaqay pȧth kun
neb nishaanaa?
zaeṭ paeṭ kaanchha yaa kalaposhaa
kaakad varqaa, taaze kalaamaa?
pȯt gari tas os laegith aasan baaraan coatah."

RAINCOAT

I entered the room
took the raincoat off
draped it over the peg.
Turned around, suddenly
looked at it long.
It looked like me
suspended from the peg.
The very same shoulders,
long unwieldy arms, and
upper back
the same stature and
girth of neck collared here.
Buttons unsettled by the pull
of buttonholes.
I looked at it well
I looked at it all over.
Opened the door and
walked out.
Walked out of this length
of clothes.
This establishment
This shop.

Two unknown men came,
asked them:
"Any personal effects
of the deceased?
Any old clothes, skullcap,
scribblings, notes,
unpublished poems?
He took to wearing
a raincoat
towards the end."

"Aahan haz owsus coat su os heri
vilinji avezaan
goda ma vonda aav tath kun vuchhnas
pate loag aki doha paanaṡ paanas
yȯt taam aav muvaefiq loag te
pata trove andh kun
kenh doh gaye aav jandegoraa ȧkh
tasy kun aakhir,
tohi kath lagi hey?"

"Asi haz os bakaariy adbi museum baapath,
tohi vanitav kaanh neb yamyuk
beyi kas tohi kunevan?
deva vuni yiyi athi?"

"Kath sae vȧni yiyi, kath yiyi athi az?
jandagȧri vaanas janda ambaaraa
kati chhaariv tohi?
Vȯni gav albatah neb, su booziv
ṭaeb kadith astaras peṭh aesis
sits senz label
'Sheikh Ilaahi Tailor Mashter'"

"Yes! He had this coat.
It hung from a peg
upstairs.
One could not bear to
see it, initially. Then
we wore it one day.
Wore it till it suited us
then it lay around.
Some days ago
a rag collector came.
We sold it to him, finally.
Say, why did you need it?"

"We required it, of course,
for the literary museum.
Who did you sell it to?
Any identifying mark?
We might still
find it."

"But how?
How do you expect
to get it
from the mountain of rags
at the collector's?
How will you fish it out?
As for the identifying mark, well
Yes!
Embroidered on the inner
lining, was the
label
'Sheikh* Ilahi, Tailor Master' "

Tr. by Shantiveer Kaul

(*Courtesy*: *Kasmir*, Canada)

---

* Sheikh is an honorific. Ilahi is God.

RAHMAN RAHI

Rahman Rahi (b. 1925) is the most eloquent advocate of obliquity (*chhayavaad*) in Kashmiri verse. He switched over to it from Urdu. His Kashmiri ghazal and *nazm* bear the impact of new Urdu poetry, that of Firaq Gorakhpuri and Faiz Ahmad Faiz in particular. His collection *Nowroz-e-Saba* won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1969. It represents a literary watershed between neo-traditional modernity and non-traditional contemporaneity. It also explores the lyrical potential of the monologue in the Kashmiri *nazm*.

A FEELING

And outside it was fog,
And silence,
And cold:
The naked trees didn't have a rag to cover them.
The surrounding mud walls are begging.

I had seen grey ashes on the oven,
And standing
kaangri-less on the window,
Whenever a shadow moved, down on the road
I felt like asking:
"*Hatay*, where are you going?
Won't you take me with you?"

There was fog,
And silence,
And cold;
And again, I sat in the corner of the granary.

Tr. by Braj B. Kachru

AMIN KAMIL

Mohammad Amin Kamil (b. 1924) is a major voice in Kashmiri poetry and one of the chief exponents of modern ghazal in the language. His verse is at once original, innovative and colloquial. His poetical collection *Laveh Te Praveh*, which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967, is a significant contribution to the ghazal.

A prolific writer in prose as well as in verse, he has a number of published works to his credit. He has ventured on new paths in the realms of short story and poetry and has tried to reflect the turmoil and conflict of the present day in his writings. Besides, he has edited three volumes of Sufi poetry in Kashmiri.

The diction used by Kamil is non-traditional and closest to the language spoken by the common man. The metres are simple. Every word is chosen with meticulous care to suit the content. New words, phrases, similes and metaphors are coined to embellish the text. The poet speaks to the reader in a colloquial tone, appealing to his inmost sentiments. He uses satire and sarcasm as a vehicle to mirror the reality of life, at the same time not hurting anyone's feelings in the process. His ghazals betray the passion of the moth and the intensity of the flame. Yet he does not feel bound by any dogma or ideology. Good imagery and lofty imagination are his forte.

Besides forging innovations based on old Kashmiri folk forms, Kamil like a great artist has introduced all the characteristics of western poetry in his work. Some good examples of modern Kashmiri *nazm* are also found in his award-winning book. They are 'Jungle', 'Flame of the Lamp',

'Miracle', 'Apple Blossom' and 'Where Will You Go Tomorrow'.

A DIRGE

Friends, comrades, contemporaries,
perhaps you still remember
and can recall
what flowers are like.

I have forgotten.
How could one's heart remember,
youth turned sere, sap dried,
mind and memory crowding out
what once one knew and loved?
It is a long time since
I have not seen a spring.

Tr. by J.L. Kaul

Note: No other poems of Rahi and Kamil were available at the time of going to the Press for inclusion in this anthology, due to circumstances beyond my control. Hope to rectify this lapse in the second edition.

—Author

MIRZA ARIF

Following the tribal invasion of Kashmir in the autumn of 1947 groups of 'Salamati Fauj' volunteers kept vigil over the streets of Srinagar, breaking the stillness of fear-laden wintry nights with the determined notes of a rhyme that gave the citizens a message of hope and cheer. The burden of the song was: "The wolf has attacked the herd but our caravan goes on uninterrupted."

The poet who wrote these lines is the veteran Mirza Ghulam Hassan Beg 'Arif' (b. 1910) who has all through the long decades sung to the glory of his motherland and whose work as a thinker is well matched by his contribution as a scientist. He is quiet by nature and abhors the limelight.

Arif, whose collection of quatrains *Lole Vetsar* won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1985, started with mysticism in the early forties but soon switched over to socio-political subjects. During the Quit Kashmir movement in 1946 he expressed the aspirations of the masses for freedom.

Arif is one of the tallest among Kashmir's poets and writers and has made a magnificent contribution to the enrichment of Kashmiri language and literature. Together with Nadim, Mahjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad he formed the group of poets who were in the forefront of the people's struggle against the Dogra rule. At 85 he is still working with zeal and zest and is widely respected. He has got recognition through many other awards and State honours.

VONUM AARAN

Vònum aaran ba chhus laaran,
ye yaavun chhum dohan taaran,
diluk taskeen chhus chhaaran,
vonum aaran ba chhus laaran.

Me aagur trov, chhus doran,
me soz-o-saaz chhaa moran,
chhu saaz-e-zindagi aaran ...

Me chhaa praarun, me chhum chhaarun,
kanen peṭh khooni dil haarun,
sakoon naayaab hushiyaaran ...

Me khaemi chham, javaeni chham,
karaan hùm hùm ba chhus bàm bàm,
guhar paidaa chhu damdaaran ...

Maheetas seety gàchh vaasil,
diluk taskeen bàni haasil,
dil-e-Arif guhar haaran.

THE HILL-STREAM

I am a hill-stream
and with youthful zest and zeal
dash forward to climes unknown
to seek my heart's content
before the youth wanes away.

Leaving my source behind
I rush without abatement,
hope goads me to pastures new
and I feel the vibrant life
smiling around me.

Sans rest I gush forth along
my path, I wait for none.
In my quest I shed heart's blood
striking against the boulders.
Restlessness is the price of vigilance.

I am young and amateur,
I roar and gnaw and chafe
and cannot bear the pearl that
is born only in the serene
depths of the ocean.

Arif tells me to get immersed
in the vast expanse of the sea,
only then can I find my
haven of peace.
What a gem of an advice!

(*Courtesy*: *Kasmir*, Canada)

RUBA AIYAAT

Azyuk mas pagahakis pyaalas baraan gachh
ma vuchh pot kun, ami bara kiny andar achh
ma vad praanis, tamich khoshboyi thav saety
pagaah nov-nov vuchh, naviraech rath tse rachh
rachh

***

Apuz takhtas, pazis khaaraan bar daar
chhu gandanaavaan hasad yeti lori dastaar
ba kya vana haal, kya bani yeth samaajas
kalàm naakhaanda heth, naamard talwaar

***

Bab yateemas log kamy miskeen gor
atha-ròt kor kamy anis, mozoor sor
sadki paeṭhe tul kamy, pyomut kamy kheov chov
socialisṭan khor bungalas por por

***

Dazaan insaaf vuchh zulmaechy grakaan kraay
talaan ath manz chhu zaelim aalamaech raay
vothaan chhana kaensy naer duba kraay phirahan
banaan mazlooma saendi ratae kaermich chhay

***

TEN QUATRAINS

Fill tomorrow's goblet with
today's wine. Don't look back,
enter through this very door.
Don't weep over the past,
retain its sweet smell with you.
Discern the new tomorrow and
absorb it bit by bit.

***

The liar ascends the throne,
the truth is hanged on the gibbet.
Out of jealousy, honours are
bestowed on the unworthy.
What can be in store for society
where illiterates wield the pen
and eunuchs the sword?

***

Who reared the orphan,
who propped the indigent,
who led the blind,
who helped the labourer,
who lifted the downtrodden
while the socialist added storey
after storey to his bungalow?

***

The tyrant's cauldron boils
when injustice burns as fuel;
world public opinion is
roasted in this very pot.
Not one raises his hands to topple
the vessel while the blood of
the oppressed is drunk like tea.

***

Zindagi akị làbri paeṭha kuy rikini làm
khày ghaman hinz, naala fanahuk pùr khumaar
poshe màrgah làbri paeṭhy maaraan chhòh
yas khasun tòg aeshi-mòt, yus pyov su khaar

***

Banaevith zindagaani paana mushkil
yi vataepòd os syòd buthi os mànzil
karaeth thàr manzilas kun gokh neerith
tulaan chhuk yus kadam doraan chhu manzil

***

Tse kharchuth lachha-bòd, màly haeny tàgi vote
ziaphaets khyaavithak, dyut-thak tomul ote
di shikmuk zòng tse jumhoori tàndooras
thuraeny chhi lachha-bàdy garma garam note

***

Pujas chhuna shraakị hund yehsaas paanas
avezaan laashi chhas aasaan dukaanas
behaan ḍokh dith baeyan hund hòṭ tsaṭàn vol
tàmis yòt taam vaataan vaery paanas

***

Life is the slippery pathway
leading to a luscious flower
meadow atop the hill. Down below
are the chasm of anguish and
the ferocious fissure of death.
That who ascends rolls in luxury,
one who falls suffers misery.

***

Thou created problems for thyself.
The path was straight and the
destination in sight.
Thou turned thy back on the
goal and went thy way.
The destination got farther
with each step thou took.

***

Thou spent lakhs to buy votes,
served delicacies to people and
gave them rice and wheat flour.
Light up the oven of democracy
with the flame of hunger.
Why not? Thou hast to bake
lakhs of hot notes (chappatis).

***

The butcher has not the feel
of the sword. He hangs corpses
in his shop and himself squats
cosily against the wall,
unmindful of the agony of other
beings. He feels the pain only
when his own turn comes.

***

Timan chashman, kàlan, jigran àthan paery
yimav mutsaraevy aflaakan baran taery
tamaah os aadmas maeraaj karanuk
jahaazas paensa kenh dith ma yiyas vaaery

***

Chha basaan luka raay qòdratich raay
awaamaechi raayi peṭh qòdrath rataan traay
lukav yas qahar kòr chhu dozaekhi suy
yamis paeṭh raaezy lukh tas jannatas jaay

Salutations to those eyes, brains
and hearts which opened the
doors to distant space!
How man had yearned to
soar higher, still higher!
He may get a chance some day
on buying a ticket in the Skylab.

***

God also takes the cue from
the trend of public opinion,
and dispenses justice accordingly.
One whom the people condemn
is consigned to inferno.
One who is liked by the masses
gets a berth in heaven.

(*Courtesy*: *Indian Literature*, New Delhi)

AZIZ DARVESH

Aziz Darvesh was a noted Sufi poet who died in 1890 A.D. No other details are available about his life and work. A small collection of his poems was published by Ghulam Mohammed Noor Mohammed long after his death.

DIGINIBALAS VIGINI VANAVAANO

Diginibalas vigini vanavaano,
bozu jaano suy soz jaan.

Sòn samandar sani baa sònayey,
ròn bàṭhis paeṭh atha mooraan,
òn kyaa zaani teera-kamaano ....

Ath sòdras vaava toophaano,
naava vuchhimas be-shumaar,
kenh phàchi tay kenh yeeraano ...

Daerith dyutnas maṇz dariyaavas,
nay vuchhmas sum nay taar,
vàth haavtam chhus gaerzaano ...

Àth kàdalas karoo zolaano,
ami apor chhuy 'faano-fil-haah',
na chhu Hyond tay na Musalmaano ...

Aziz mòt gomut devaano,
lolabaayan sokhan baavaan,
nekh mardan haendi anamaano ...

THE SINGING NYMPHS

Nymphs are singing at the fountain,
My friend! Listen to their sweet song.

The sea of life is fathomless, deep,
A maimed wrings his hands on the
shore. A blind man can't make
any use of the bow and arrow.

A tempest blows furiously in
this ocean. And numerous boats
are seen struggling. Some have
sunk while others are adrift.

Fate threw me into the midstream,
there is no bund or embankment.
God alone will lead me across;
I am an alien in this land.

Use thyself as a fetter to
cross this bridge. Once across, you
will get annihilated in the Divine,
with no label of Hindu or Muslim.

Aziz has gone mad. He divulges
to fellow-men the secrets of love
which he has heard from saints.

KHWAJA HABIB

Khwaja Habib (1555-1618), Sufi poet, composed poems in both Persian and Kashmiri. He has to his credit a collection of Persian verse also. In some of his Kashmiri poems he has employed the same metre as used by Habba Khatoon, who was his contemporary.

DEETHMAS TAN

Tseniny poshi ranga hai ḍeethmas tan,
tse nòn no vàny zey bozi aalam.

Doha aki tas ta mey maejaayi tan,
haa amob thovnam suy laadan,
aaevyul maa sanyos myon zaevyul badan,
tse nòn no vàny zey bozi aalam.

Aarifav ta aashikav rachaeyi van,
maani booz Mansoory, naara dạzis tan,
"Anal-Haq" pòr tamy manẓ maarakan,
tse nòn no vàny zey bozi aalam.

I SAW HIS BODY

I saw his body,* which is of the
colour of peach blossom. My friend,
pray don't divulge this secret as
the world will make a scandal of it.

One day our bodies met in an embrace.
I keenly long for a similar tryst again,
but he shuns me; perhaps my delicate
bony body had pressed him too hard.

Lovers and devotees repaired to woods,
but Mansoor alone realised the meaning
of love, that burnt his body, and he
openly proclaimed: "I am the Truth."

---

* The poem explains a subtle spiritual experience. The heat that consumed Mansoor refers to the source of all supernatural energy linking man with God.

WAHAB KHAR

Wahab Khar (1842-1912) was a renowned poet who wrote two *masnavis*, "Qisai Sheikh Sanan" and "Maanch Toolir", and ghazals and lyrics in the Sufiana style. The Dogra ruler, Maharaja Amar Singh, in appreciation of his important work, sent him a cash gift of Rs 300 and a horse but he declined to accept the same. A collection of his ghazals and his "Bayaaz" were published by Ghulam Mohammed Noor Mohammed long after his death.

VANTAY LO HAY LO

Yaaery dòp maashokh paeda karantay,
paeda gav 'kalâm ta lávh',
rabasund pharmaan lyookh kalamantay,
vantay lo hay lo.

Rama Rama paryaev Sheikh Sanahantay,
Hènzi mòkha lòb tamy yaar,
bùt polun Koran zoluntay...

Àna pòr Hazrati Mansoorantay,
màna nishi lòb tàmy yaar,
vananuy seer chhuy aevyul pàntay....

Vajoodi aadamas ditsaam kàntay,
sajooda roodus bo,
tanashut vajid aav malakantay....

SING HEY HO FOR JOY

Love said: "My Beloved I shall create";
and lo! there were tablet and pen.
The pen wrote the command of God.
Sing hey ho for joy.

Sheikh Sanaa recited Rama's name,
and in a Hindu girl he found his love.
He worshipped an idol, burnt the Koran.

"I am the Truth", said Hazrat Mansoor,
in his own mind he found his love.
That secret is impossible to tell.

I tried to know the secret of man's
being and made obeisance low.
The angels danced with joy.

Tr. by J.L. Kaul

(*Courtesy*: *Studies in Kashmiri*)

RETSH DED

Retsh Ded, an eminent saint-poetess, seer and philosopher of Kashmir, lived through the twentieth century shrouded in mystery. It was only twelve years after her death in 1966 that her literary compositions first saw the light of the day. For a while it seemed that the illustrious Lal Ded (Lalleshwari of the fourteenth century) had taken another birth.

Born in Srinagar in 1880, Retsh Ded (literal meaning 'Noble Mother') was a loving, unsophisticated woman with tremendous yogic powers. She blessed one and all, irrespective of caste and creed, never uttered a harsh word, lived a saintly life and quietly passed away. Her real name was Saenpat Devi.

Retsh Ded composed about 450 delectable *vaakh* (short, crisp sayings) using the common man's language. These were published by her son Hari Krishan 'Fani' in 1980, her birth centenary year. The *vaakh* were edited by a poet and family friend, Prithvinath Kaul 'Sayil'. Actually, the number of *vaakh* was much higher (1,000 according to her son) but many of them were lost to posterity due to reasons beyond human ingenuity.

The husband of Retsh Ded, Pt. Janardhan Kaul 'Sagar', was also a litterateur and poet in his own right. He died in 1918 when Retsh Ded was only 38. Now she was lonely and woebegone but spiritual beacons guided her. She hid the agony of her soul in the deep recesses of her heart. To keep the wolf away, she plied the spinning wheel round the clock. Her son was still in his teens. As time passed by, he got married and also found a job but was posted in a far-flung

area. By then Retsh Ded had shown signs of ageing and so her daughter-in-law, Danawati, was obliged to stay back in Srinagar to look after her.

Plying the spinning wheel continued to be part of the daily routine of Retsh Ded. She poured forth her pent-up anguish in the shape of *vaakh* while the wheel of her life revolved emanating a low weeping sound. However, being unlettered she could not record her lines. Her daughter-in-law watched this phenomenon with hushed amazement. Whenever she was free from household chores, she took down in Devnagari whatever Retsh Ded muttered. This process continued for thirty long years. The young lady would slyly deposit the papers in a wooden almirah, layer upon layer, without letting anyone know what transpired within the four walls.

Retsh Ded died unwept and unsung at the ripe age of 86 and Danawati forgot all about the invaluable treasure lying in the almirah at the mercy of the moths. Twelve years later, while on her death bed she mustered courage enough to divulge the 'secret' to her husband and the 400-odd *vaakh* were rescued from the clutches of whiteants.

SELECTED VAAKH

Kalaa chhay lalit, kalaa chhe shilp,
Kalaa chhe sangeet — sur, taal, raag,
Kalaa chhe vatsun, kalaa chhe vanavun,
Kalaa chhe kavita — pàd, chhand, suhaag,
Kalaa chhe hàrsh, kalaa chhe anand,
Kalaa chhe mohini, yàtch, lol, anuraag.

Art is beauty personified, beauty carved in stone,
Art betokens music — sur, taal and raga,
Art is like a pithy ditty sung in chorus,

Art is poetry — a couplet, a stanza, a melody,
Art is a state of ecstasy and eternal peace,
Art is charm, allurement, love and longing.

***

Vaaens chhe ne manushas chhoniravaan,
Sobhaav chhu ne manushas handeravaan,
Mȧrg chhu amaa yi vȧrga valaan,
Roog chhu andry-andri sanderavaan.

Age does not detract from a man's life-span,
Nor does temperament make him stale,
Only the death of near ones dashes him down,
The hidden malady hollowing his interior.

***

Veshwaas chhu nishchay, veshwaas chhe shraddha,
Veshwaas chhu saahas, parteet te aasha,
Veshwaas chhu saadan, anaan sedhi, saphalta,
Veshwaas chhu swȧyambhu, aatma gyaanich pratima.

Confidence is firm resolve, trust and faith,
Confidence is courage, belief and hope,
Confidence is a vehicle for achieving success,
Confidence is self-existence, an idol for realisation.

***

Kȧmchi prȧth chhu maazas lȧha khaaraan,
Mȯkha prȧth chhu karaan aḍijan soor,
Kuḍur vanun chhu be-sur, grinaah gaaraan,
Shȧni-shani gaalaan te pholevun noor.

The stroke of the whip raises whales on the flesh,
But the blow of the tongue pounds the very bones.
Harsh words are discordant and breed hatred,
Slowly eclipsing the brilliant light of love.

***

Yus dyi pȧzich hȧkh, suy chhu mujaahid,
Pȯz chhu khȯdaai, kyaazi khȯdai chhu waahid,
Neki chhane raavaan, neki chha pȯz yimaan,
Yohoy myon deen mȧzhab, ȧth chhum khȯda shaahid.

He who raises the voice of truth is a crusader,
Truth is God because God is one.
A kind deed never goes waste, kindness is true faith,
It is my religion and God bears testimony to this.

***

Dayaaloo mȧn chhu ȧkh sundar baagh,
Bȧrus sȧg ta gȧnḍus tse pai,
Rut vetsaar chhu ȧkh sundar byol,
Chhak ye butaraech ta karus lai;
Modhur shabd chhu ȧkh sundar posh,
Karaan paraazyat shathras, anaan kathi vizai;
Wopakaar-kirti chhe ȧkh sundar phal,
Seṭhaa myuṭh, seṭhaa pooṭh, bina samshai.

Kind heart is like a delightful garden,
Water it fully and keep it duly fenced,
Good thought is like a beautiful seed,
Sow it and, surely, raise a bumper crop.
Sweet word is like a charming flower,
It disarms enemies and ensures success;
Benevolence is like a delicate fruit,
Large-sized and very delicious, indeed.

***

Zindagi chhe àkh sàmai, àkh avsar te àkh kaal,
Zindagi chhe hechhun te hechhit vartaavun, amaa kaṭhin sawaal,
Zindagi chhe tsu-vòt, du-tsyòt te suma-soth,
Yohuy parzanaavun, parkhaavun, raṭun, traavun mahaal.

Life is time — an age full of opportunities,
To imbibe good and to do good is a difficult task;
Life is a crossroads, a deceptive path, an embankment,
To identify, test, accept or reject these is hard.

***

Aatma anubhav chhu divaan diva gyaan,
Avày aatma gyaaṇik chhi saeri anuraagi;
Aatma gyaan chhu mukhti hund nishaan,
Su aestan yogi, bhogi, raagi yaa tyaagi.

Self-realisation results in recognition of God,
That is why the wise strive to know themselves;
Self-knowledge is the symbol of salvation for all,
Be it a yogi, sensualist, lover or anchorite.

***

Gaatlev chhu vònamut har kaanh chhu anzaan,
Saari na nipun, saarney na pehchaan,
Itihaas chhu zyooṭh, prasang chhi anek,
Prath kaensi sankooch, be-had chhu kreshaan.

The wise say everybody is ignorant,
All are not experts, all are not seers,
The agenda is quite long, topics are numerous,
All suffer from handicaps but they long to learn.

***

Dȧyi naav sȯrun, su mȧnas dhaarun,
Suy zėvi pȧrun, gayi saez sumran,
Gwȧr dhaarun, tas nishi anubhav yaarun,
Suy Ishwar mangal — amar, ajar, sanatan.

Remembering God, enshrining him in the heart,
And reciting His name is the unaffected rosary;
A guru is necessary for gaining spiritual bliss,
Which is immortal, imperishable and timeless.

***

Gaash aasi ta ȧsi prakash maeli,
Dimov tsyat aesi ta vȯpadhi yehsaas,
Qasma-qasam kȧth chham hȧnga te mȧnga,
Karav pȧchh kaensi diya su veshwaas.

Only if we are lettered can we attain knowledge,
Only by delving deep can we realise our duty;
Why take recourse to oaths for nothing?
If we put faith in someone, he will not fail us.

***

Mėva chhu aasaan seṭha chȯk pȧpna bronṭh,
Mantar chhu baasaan neshphal zȧpna bronṭh;
Shur chhu karaan gaangal kėnh dȧpna bronṭh,
Bekael chhu rozaan nȧm-tȧl gaatul sȧpna bronṭh.

Fruit is quite bitter before it ripens,
Mantra seems ineffective before it is recited;
A child poses problems before it learns to speak,
A fool remains subjugated until he grows wise.

(*Courtesy*: *National Herald*, New Delhi.)

MOTI LAL SAQI

Moti Lal Saqi (b. 1936) is a well known progressive poet and writer and a talented researcher. He has rendered signal service to Kashmiri language and literature. Besides poems, he has written five operas and some short stories and compiled the works of several old masters like Nund Rishi and Parmanand. He has edited five volumes of folk songs and two volumes of Sufi poetry. Among his publications are, *Modri Khwaab* (poetry), *Aankvan* (research papers) and *Samad Mir* (monograph). His poetical collection *Mansar* won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1981. He also got the J and K Cultural Academy Award in 1980. He was awarded the Padmashri in 1989. He has translated Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* and *Letters of John Keats* into Kashmiri.

VAENATI

Shora bàmas seety thar dith murli vaayan vaali,
tse malhaaras gachh vòj divaan,
deva kumalan vuṭh yeth aakaashas,
àsi vaensaa gayi yeti taapa dazaan.

Murli vaayan vaali ...
me gòchh shehajaar vòndas,
yus kaamàny gav,
me chha hàn-hàn àndari naara vuhaan.

A PLEA

Leaning against the stockpile
of gunpowder, O flautist!
Sing thou the 'malhar' raga
and tirelessly play the lute.
maybe, the lips of this blue sky
sparkle with a smile.
For generations we have been
blistering in the fiery heat.

O flute-player! My heart
craves for coolness that has
no place in the domain of reality.
Every limb of mine is kindling
within with a flame unknown.

Murli vaayan vaali, me bȧs ȧkh vaenati chham,
gȧv shaamur sirya ta ghati hyȯt kaad kaḍun,
aaveza muqaaman yina gachhaham,
yina vȯsi yith vaayakh deepak raag.

MANDORA

Gȧgar lȧgimaty chhi yeth mȧndori heri bȯn,
yiman gȧyi vaaens ȧth praataan ȧndari,
vasaan chhas bor thrasa pash chhus avezaan,
kaenas kȧny-kȧny kadis yus yemi tȧly pȯk,
granḍyan chhas naas gaemich ruma viraaman,
chha khȧtsamatsa haayi rȧza ȧth taaka daaraen,
bȧran ṭaṇg chhȯny ta hȧṇg aamaety chhi neerith,
vuchhan vaalaen chhu taejub, vuṭh chhi tsaapaan,
dȧrith kitha kȧny chha laer kȧs fikiri tȯr zaanh.

Nȧvemich noola zaathaa chhay makaanas,
nea sangaah ȧch nivaan koorith chhi lookan,
ȧki dighi rata chhooli vaalaan makaan.

Yimav hyȯk draayi tim mȧndora traavith,
seṭha gayi baala buzy, chhapi lȧgy zamaanas,
aḍyav seki shaaṭh rȧty, ȧḍy sȧdra pȧth gayi,
be ghar sapadith zuvas bȧs raachh thaevikh,
vȯnuy roodukh na ȧsy kȧm aasy, kȯt vaety.

O flautist! I have but one prayer.
dusk is passing, and soothing
dark shades are spreading fast.
May thou not, obliged by time,
begin to sing 'deepak' raga!

MANSION

Rodents inhabit this mansion from top to bottom.
For years they have hollowed its interior,
the plaster is coming off the walls
and the roof is crumbling.
Whosoever passes by carries away a stone
from its foundation,
its beams have putrified
and spans are cracking.
Windows are full of dust and cobwebs,
doors have got unhinged.
Onlookers bite their lips with wonder,
none can guess how this building
is still standing in position.

A mongoose cluster has also appeared
in the mansion now, spreading terror.
They gouge out the eyes of the inmates
in a jiffy and instantly dye
the whole floor with blood.

Those who had the wherewithal
managed to flee the mansion.
Some perished in mountain passes,
some others were consumed by time,
yet others repaired to deserts.
A few went across the oceans to
save their skin, yet got uprooted,
not knowing who they were and
how far they had sauntered.

Chhi vòny màndori maṇz baskeen kàts taam,
vadaan vàdy-vàdy karaan tim shaam subahas,
khabar chhakh vuny-na-vuny paeyi sheri làb paeṭh,
khabar chhakh àsy chhi be-dasgaah, karan kyaah,
karaan shets kaen chhu yeth màndori vusavaar,
yi bàchaeyi vaaensan ta deva doh saaeny naeran,
àchhin tàl raazabal chhukh aes vaeharith.

NAV YAATRA

Chhònuy draamut chhu sàfaras raah musaefir,
na chhus pàth kaanh ze yus praaraan rozaes,
na buthi dàgdaar yus zan naaz bozaes,
pyomut asmaana zan taarukh vasith kaanh.

Kunuy zòn loosmut thokmut haryomut,
pakaan dòk-dòk karith deva vaati kun paeṭh,
vànis tàl chhus na chhum kàth gaam vaatun.

Khasaan àki baala kara taentaali shah phuer,
vasaan beyi khangàra dima dòkis àndar thakh,
pàki àndh gaamy tàti chhis hoony doraan,

Those still left in the mansion
can be counted on fingers.
They weep day and night fearing
that they might be buried anytime
under the tottering side walls.
Being friendless, helpless
what can they possibly do?
A wishful thought sustains them —
the foundation of the mansion
is quite strong, see how it has
withstood the ravages of ages,
maybe, it survives their lifespan too —
But what a pity! The burning
pyre stares them in the face.

(*Courtesy*: *Kasmir*, Canada.)

NEW PILGRIMAGE

Empty-handed, a traveller has set forth
alone on a long journey,
with none back home to wait for him
nor on the way to look after him,
as if he is a star fallen from the sky.

Forlorn, fatigued and famished
he walks like a hunchback
in search of his destination,
not knowing whither to go,
where to reach.

Ascending one mountain he hopes
to rest on the summit,
Descending from another he wants
to lie down in some hut below.
Passes through a far-flung village
only to be hounded out by dogs.

màtis shàhras àndar retsi chhis tulaan lookh,
yuthuy pàki màrgi maeṇzy kandy aas vaharana.

Kuni kàti gàv kànan tàs pariya vanavun,
na ḍechhan vigini kuni kòla raada pheraan,
vànay kyah divataahav taam ḍaajihas vàth,
pakaan be-vaayi gav pàky-pàky pakaan rood.

Chhònḍun shiniyaah chhokaev, seki paeṭh ditsan daaph,
sumay rozas na yuth istaada gàtsihay,
vuhaan os siryi, sekh aes naara mànqal,
phiraen àchh bàs su aakaashas vuchhaan rood.

Chhu tàna paeṭha kaad dith tàthy jaayi moojood,
khàsaan shah chhus, bàndas kuni chhas na hàrkath,
lukav yeli vuchh dòpukh yi chhu ryòsh gòmut leen,
màndar khorukh tati sòna seri laegith.

Yivaan dòhadish chhi tòt be-vaayi àz lookh,
karaan yoogi tàti àz kal abaadath,
be-sòkh rooh toory sòkha baapath chhi laaraan.

The city's madding crowd takes him
for a lunatic and calls him names.
While negotiating a meadow
thorns block his path.

He neither heard the mellifluous
notes of fairies in the wood,
nor saw the nymphs dance
on lush green river banks.
Even the gods misled him,
still he kept on treading
without respite.

After traversing dreary lands
and deserts he got weary
only to lie flat on the sand,
sans courage to get up again.
The sun was burning overhead
and the earth emitted flames.
He fixed his wistful gaze
on the high heaven.

Since then he has lain there
with his legs outstretched.
He is breathing but all his
limbs are motionless.
People mistook him for a
'rishi' in deep meditation
and built a temple of golden
bricks at that very spot.

Today, myriads of devotees visit
the place to seek peace
for their agitated souls.
Even 'yogis' contemplate there.

(*Courtesy*: *Pratibha India*, Delhi.)

ARJAN DEV MAJBOOR

Distinguished poet and short story writer, Arjan Dev Majboor was born in 1923 at Zainapora village of Pulwama district in Kashmir. His father's name was Kailas Ram Kaul. After graduating from Srinagar he went to Lahore in 1942 for studying Sanskrit. Later he passed M.A. from Kashmir University and also got a degree in teaching. He started his career as a journalist and worked in daily *Hamdard* and monthly *Kong Posh* for short periods from 1945 to 1951. In 1954 he became a teacher and retired as a lecturer in 1978.

Majboor has to his credit three verse collections. The first one, *Aman ta Zindagi* (Peace and Life), was published in 1954 and the second, *Dashe Haar* (Garland), came in 1983. The third book, *Dazawani Kousam* (Burning Lilacs), which appeared in 1987, is an outstanding work, containing 24 *nazms*, some *vatsun*, ghazals and *vaakh* of high poetical quality. They are marked by deftness of expression, deep introspection, progressive outlook and mature treatment. The whole work constitutes a muffled outcry of his bruised heart against the disappearance of old values and the disequilibrium of modern life.

His latest book, *Padi Samayik*, is a long poem containing the story of Kashmir's composite culture since time immemorial narrated in flowery language with an uncanny flow of expression. The book has won an award from the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar, as one of the best literary works of 1994.

Padi Samayik (Footprints of Time) is the product of his burning passion for his lovely homeland, which attained full expression only after his migration in early 1990

following the onset of terrorism in that land which was known through the ages for its secular character and brotherhood of man and whose inhabitants assimilated good characteristics of all religions thus making the Valley the confluence of a composite Indian, Central Asian and European culture. The book is interspersed with scintillating short poems some of which refer to the happenings of the last five years. The poet involuntarily asks: "Who clipped off the wings of the spring of my paradise?"

A number of his research papers and short stories have appeared in literary journals. A notable contribution of his is *Obra Shetsh*, a translation of Kalidasa's *Meghdoot*. He has also written a monograph on the eminent Bhakti poet of Kashmir, Krishna Joo Razdan.

PAEYI NAA VUNALI VATAN PRAAGAASH

Mòchhi moorith tsòl
hàn-hàn ṭukarith pron vàriyi,
pardesas maṇz zànta kaenith gàv
myon vojood,
chhàli-chhàli myonuy dòl katarovun,
aasanas basanas laejin shraakh,
taerikhi tath shahras myaenis
bòrbaedi hund naal vòlun,
gaaman zan tika-taar kòrun.

***

Nàs chaeṭ hish kosataamath aayi
ta shahmàth vaeharaevin,
kaetyan maanzi gulaen lòg naar;
khaana vujaari kaetyan lookan
baagi leechhin,
kaetyan mosooman hund gulshan
dooṭhy kòrun,
kaetyan ṭhaesikh bàdanas kily,
kaetyan hund àsmath lootovukh,
kaetyan seenas gav biriyaan,
katsan màndoran lòg naar
maehalan pooryan gàv samhaar,
kaetyan aalyan naash sàpun.

***

Soruy maery mandyut daehy buzy,
ràta saery gav paataal
ta trihaerith vòth aakaash.

***

WHEN WILL THE FOG DISPERSE!

The tortuous sands of time passed by
last year in this alien land,
leaving a deep repentance at
the loss of my identity and
tearing the edge of my gown to shreds.
The laughter and the cosy life I
had known are now a dream.
My own historic city and villages
have become a shambles!

***

Which evil spirit visited my
rose garden bringing misery
all over? Who knows how many
henna-coated hands got burns,
how many people were uprooted!
how many innocent flower-meadows
were struck by hailstorm,
How many bodies were nailed,
how many women were raped,
how many bosoms were riddled
with bullets,
how many beautiful houses
were burnt down,
how many rural habitations
were destroyed,
how many birds lost their nests!

***

All beauty was besmeared with tar,
The nether world was soaked in blood
while the heaven trembled!

***

Kuni kiny yiyi naa vaava ringaah àkh
sòntaech khoshavaeny,
chaakan kari naa kaanchha vaaṭh,
baavai kaetyah chhòkh hai baayo,
khàsi kar zakhman myaanaen àng.

***

Baaman yin naa kuni kiny neerith,
paaman làgi naa kuni kiny and,
phulayaa barjastai baagan hinz
kàri naa aalav teliki paeṭhy,
baalas kun àchh dara chhàm lajimàtsy
paeyi naa vunali vàtan praagaash!

Would a whiff of pleasant spring
breeze come from anywhere,
would anyone sew our wounds!
My brother! How many injuries
shall I show you?
Who knows when will these sores heal.

***

Let new buds appear on the trees,
let us stop blaming one another.
When will the old full-blown
spring beckon us again?
My gaze is fixed on Pir Panchal,*
I wish the fog on its winding
paths yields to sunshine!

(*Courtesy*: *Koshur Samachar*, New Delhi.)

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* The Bannihal mountain. (The poem was written in 1991 at Udhampur.)

GHULAM NABI FIRAQ

Ghulam Nabi Firaq (b. 1922) is a notable poet who has, through his creative genius, opened up new frontiers of thought and style and made a tremendous contribution to Kashmiri literature. He began writing poetry in Kashmiri in 1950. Initially he was influenced by socialism and his writings reflect his concern for the poor and the downtrodden. Mature portrayal of life and nature is his forte. He has to his credit two volumes of poetry, *Yim Saani Aalav* (in collaboration with Rahman Rahi) and *Naev Shaar Sombran*, and two books on literary criticism. He has translated a large number of English and Persian poems into Kashmiri. He is a gentleman *par excellence*.

EILAAN

Hata saa hey booziv
vaara booziv
ba karana yeti yor akh kath ti
zev nengalaava
vuṭhan dima ṭaeb
ta shahan dapa yuthna shor laagiv
ta saḍhka phuteraan pakiv

***

Qasam chhum aaba lathan hund
yima sòdran hund veqaar rachhaan chhe
anaery obra deran hund

DECLARATION

Listen, dear sirs,
let me have your ear!
I shall not utter a single word hence;
I'll swallow down my tongue,
stitch my lips together,
exhort my breath not to
stamp down the road, or
even the garrulous.

***

I swear by streams
that keep up the prestige of oceans.
By crimson cloud conglomerations

yim baala thangaen gulaeby jaama valaan chhi
siryi zetsan hund
yima anigaṭis paara-paara karaan chhe
timan tsihaen hund
yali zameeni paeṭh godanichy zoov-zaats aechhy
mutsaraav
ba karana yeti yor ȧkh kath ti

***

Hey vaara booziv
agar myaanaen kathan hindis aenas maṇz
tohi vuchhiv zi...
gaashir subahas chhu haayun vopȧdaan
shaamas chhu shaamrun raey gachhaan
tassavuran hind gahil vȧn chhi khaali sapadaan
khaab chhi sheena thosik paeṭh vegelaan
zindagiya chhu panun osloob atha gachhaan
aare palan paeṭh karas haara phaely

Me kaer kath
ta kathi maṇz chhe kath aasan
me vechhanov azeem Mohammad sund aasun
azeem aavaaz ...
path kaal, ȧz kaal ta aayenda kaal
saariviy kȯr mulaqaath
mandiny saharaavas bȯr zinda obra chhalav lol
nyatha nȧny maagas kaer sonta rangav meeṭhy
me kȯr Varqa sinzi gaashdaari kun ti ishaara
tȧmi vaniyaav....
"Yemi katha chha husnuk aagur
kaash ba aasun tȧmi saatan ti zinda
yeli tȯhi panun qaum be-vatan kari."

that invest hilltops in rosy raiment.
By sunbeams that pulverise darkness.
By those moments when
primordial life yawned on the globe.
I'll not utter a single word hence.

***

Listen intently, dear sirs,
If in the mirror of my words
you perceive luminous dawn growing murky,
the red glow washed out of dusk,
the dim woods of concepts reduced to emptiness,
dreams dissolved like snow-flakes, or
life deviating from its pattern,
I'll smash it on the boulders of a hill-stream.

I spoke, but a word conceals other words.
I have dilated upon the existence of the great
Mohammad,
a mighty voice —
The past, the present and the future
held a conclave.
The unbearable midday heat was hugged by
friendly clouds,
the stark Magh was invested in colourful vernal
apparel,
I alluded to the perceptiveness of Varqa;
It is he who said:
"These happenings betoken the fountain of beauty,
Would that I were alive even
when your own clan disowns you!"

Kyaazi?
"Path kaale ti chhu tee sapudmut."
Me ditsov Abu Jahala sund ti havaala
tikyaazi tami vanyaav ...
"Kus sanaa traavi yim potily kyaah gom
zindagi henz adaa chha ṭaaeth panaeny
ȧsi chhu path kaal kona rachharaavun."

***

Tawarikh chhu myaanen kathan gawaah
yi me jaana molas maly hetsaav
ti yaemich shahaadat kaathyuk thazar
ta gophi hund khaamoṣh ani-gȯt divaan chhum
ta thaavyom tohi bronthakani
akhtaabas chha na zew ...
dapahas van yi chhunaa pȯz
samȧndarechan lahran chha na fursat
dapahak vaniv yiman myaanen kathan
ba ma chhus ghalat vanaan

***

Nȧni kȧtha chhe ȧnigaṭi shoobaan
dapyaam krakh dima ta vana
ḣayo pananis paanas aasanvaaly vanan vaalyav
hayo vyȧtha-bȧla kyov netha-nȧnyav
talaa saeriv panany zaath ta butraath
talaa sombriv panany paery zaan
ta vaniv ...
tuhi chhivaa pȧzy paeṭhy aasanvaely?
tuhi chhivaa pȧzy paeṭhy gaashdaaṛ?

***

Why?
"It has happened even in the past."
I made reference even to Abu Jaḥal.
He, it was, who declared:
"Who will, God forbid, abandon the idols?
Our past is very dear to us,
so is to us our inherited life-style. Why not venerate them?"

***

History is witness to my words:
What I staked my life for —
the very thing witnessed by the height of the gallows,
and the still darkness of the cave,—
the very same I placed before you.
The sun lacks a tongue,
and I can't call him to depose;
the waves of the ocean are ever on the move,
I would ask them
To corroborate of what I say is true.

***

Unpleasant words are best spoken in the dark.
I felt like crying and saying:
"You, who call yourselves the 'elite',
You of the Veth* bank deprived of the fig-leaf,
let you finger out your roots,
focus your sense perceptions
and tell me:
Are you truly the elite/well-to-do?
Are you honestly gifted with sharp perception?"

***

* Veth means the Vitasta.

Na, ba dima na kenh krakh
agar samàndar grakh ti kari
agar tath aavalaeny paruen ti karan
agar su baṭhyan ta baeran ḍaehith ti vaali
agar tamyuk soruy aasun
baha banith shunis maṇz tahleel ti sapdi
ba roza toti khaamosh.

No, I'll not cry;
even though the ocean comes to a boil,
even though whirlpools overwhelm it,
even though it saps the shores and dykes,
even though the whole body of water
is absorbed as vapour in the endless void,
I'll still silence maintain.

Tr. by Prof. S.L. Sadhu

(*Courtesy*: *Kasmir*, Canada)

SHORT STORIES

DEATH ANNIVERSARY

By Mohd. Zaman Azurdah

Dr. Mohd. Zaman Azurdah is a prose writer of repute. He has specialised in Kashmiri essays and short stories and is very popular for his simple diction, sense of wit and pungent satire. His book, *Essay*, got the Sahitya Akademi Award for 1984. He teaches in Kashmir University.

Today, Tota* had been sitting for a long time in front of the mirror watching her image again and again. Her sandalwood-coloured countenance had acquired a unique freshness like a newly grown lotus in the Dal Lake whose face is continuously washed by the waves. Only if Kostoor** could see her at this time he would frantically hold her in an embrace.

Tota was herself intrigued by this sudden mental change in her after a lapse of five years. How did her dead emotions come back to life? She had not listened to anyone all these years. Many relatives intervened, her father pleaded with her by reminding her of his old age and the worldly vicissitudes, but she could not forget Kostoor. However, today she looked different and none could understand the reason of this transformation. Nevertheless, her parents became

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* Name of a girl; literal meaning is 'parrot'.

** Name of a boy; literal meaning is 'song-thrush'.

very jubilant on seeing her in such a cheerful mood.

Tota bestowed lavish caresses on her parents today. For the past five years she had not stirred out of her room and was always seen buried among heaps of books. She had, so to say, divorced even her friends and companions. She did not go to call on anyone nor did she attend any feast. Her servant used to bring books for her to read. While normally girls are fond of wearing costly dresses, she had given up this habit also. Even otherwise, however, she looked ravishing in the simplest attire.

Tota's mother involuntarily got down the memory lane to have a panoramic view of the childhood of her only offspring — how she played pranks and indulged in antics, how she used to go to college and, finally, how she forsook earthly pleasures and retired into a world of her own.

She heaved a deep sigh and said to herself, "Had Kostoor been alive today, Tota would not be in such a sad plight. How ominous was that day when I got blindfolded. Had I understood then what was dear to her heart she would have been spared this unending torture." Such thoughts filled her eyes with copious tears.

At this stage, Tota entered the room with a smile on her face. She hugged her mother, wiped her tears and said, "Mamma, you always believed in doing things inopportunely. You used to laugh when I wept. Now when I laugh you have started weeping."

Her mother wiped her face and replied, "No dear, I was not weeping. I just remembered something."

Tota asked, "By the way, what did you remember? Was it your own childhood or my old age?" Then she added with a smile, "Mamma, nothing in this world is worth remembering. Forget everything. Forget even me. One should remember one's own self. If a man is embarrassed by his own self then he should forget it also."

Her mother did not say anything in reply. Tota said,

"All right, I shall now go and look up Daddy. You stay here." Then she had a hearty laugh and proceeded to her father's room. Her mother's heart sank with anguish. She recollected how she had opposed tooth and nail the proposal made by Kostoor to marry Tota... "How nice a boy he was! He would look after my daughter with full zeal and zest. Now the poor fellow is embedded in his grave. He loved Tota passionately. He used to drop in almost daily on one pretext or another. Once when Tota had to be hospitalised, he suffered a lot. He would visit the hospital daily, run after doctors and do all other odd jobs. He was hardly seventeen at that time...

"Alas! I went mad and could not realise how Tota was over head and ears in love with him. She too herself did not mention anything to me. She preferred to be guillotined. But we also never tried to know her mind. The whole thing ended in a jiffy. We lost our wits and failed to evaluate Kostoor's nice qualities. He was really priceless. He was educated, handsome and well-mannered. The only snag was that his mother did not come from a noble family.

"But what would we gain from high caste? Alas! Had I not remained adamant he would not have committed suicide. Woe is me! His curly hair and beautiful face come before my eyes. But now all this is of no avail. If Tota agrees, I would get her married to my nephew."

When Tota entered her father's room, the latter was looking through an old family album. He was so engrossed in seeing the photographs that he failed to notice her arrival. It was for the first time in five years that Tota had entered this room. Notwithstanding this, he used to go to her room every day, gave her gifts and occasionally doled out some advice but she would never reply to any query from him.

This morning, when he had gone to her room as usual, he had found her sitting in front of the mirror. He caught a glimpse of her face through the mirror and, gauging her changed mood, felt elated and retraced his steps quietly. Rushing to his wife, he said to her, "Today, after ages, Tota

appears to be happy. Don't spoil her mood again by saying anything untoward to her." He was fully convinced that his wife alone had been responsible for Tota's sad plight. But it was no use crying over split milk. He could not resurrect the dead past.

Today he had been feeling jubilant right from the moment he had left Tota's room. It seemed as if he had found a treasure. She was his only child. On finding her happy after a lapse of five long years he felt like going to her stealthily and holding her in a tight embrace. But he considered himself also guilty and so dared not go near her lest she should relapse into a sad mood. Nevertheless, he was beside himself with joy. That also explains why he commanded his wife not to spoil Tota's mood. On such happy occasions he invariably peeped into the album of his youthful days.

Tota came quietly and stood in front of him. At that moment he was watching a joint photograph of Tota, her mother and Kostoor. When he saw his daughter standing before him he closed the album. He held Tota close to himself and said to her, "Come on, darling. I am very happy that you have left your room today and entered this room. I can't believe that this has really happened. Your Mamma is keeping indifferent health. She might recover as a result of this change in you...."

While her father counselled her thus, Tota was lost in a reverie. She again remembered her old dream and said to herself, "How will my childhood friend, who has been lying in the grave for five years, find peace? He is restless in his new abode. Did he not complain of this when I saw him in a dream the other day? He addressed me in these words: 'Tota, you had promised to keep me company always like a shadow and chase me everywhere. Then how do you manage to have rest? Are you happy without me? My gaze is fixed on the road and I yearn to have a glimpse of you.'"

Her thought process was interrupted when her father

patted her shoulder and said, "Whatever I possess in the shape of worldly wealth is only for you. Had I another offspring I could look to him for succour. Pray, give up this madness and be happy. I have a keen desire to get you married."

Tota had a laugh and replied, "Dear father, why do you say so? How can I think of getting married and leave you alone to your fate? In case you had a son I would hand you over to him."

Her father retorted, "Look, my darling. Every daughter has to leave her father in the end... Well, let us drop this topic. Let us go for an outing. Ask your Mamma also to get ready." Tota cut him short by saying, "I won't go with you and Mamma. I shall go with Sula."

Sula was their old servant. Her father readily agreed, "All right, go with him. Do you need any money? You may like to buy something." Tota replied, "No, I don't want to make any purchases, I only want to go to the shrine of Makhdoom Sahib. Even otherwise, I have some money on me." After a pause she asked for permission to go.

Her father did not think it proper to reject her request. He, however, had his apprehensions. Hiding his fears, he advised her to return home quickly.

Sula and Tota were walking on the road to Makhdoom Sahib's shrine, which is situated on the slope of the Hari Parbat Hill. Tota had heard that Kostoor lay buried in the spacious graveyard at the foot of this hill. As they were approaching the shrine, Tota said to the servant, "Your father will rest eternally in heaven, Sula, if you show me the grave of Kostoor, please." Sula was not at all bothered abut his father but he loved Tota whom he had fondly reared from her very childhood. For the past five years he had been attending exclusively to her work. And he too bemoaned the loss of Kostoor. He was also mature enough to know Tota's secrets.

He heaved a sigh and said, "My child, what use will all this be now?" Tota touched his bearded chin in a beseeching gesture. "Uncle Sula, kindly take me to his grave. I shall get some solace. You only show me the place. I shall not stay there for long."

Sula could not think of a reply. He thought that since such a long period had elapsed she might not be overwhelmed by grief on seeing the grave as she normally would be if the tragedy had still been fresh. So he led her to Kostoor's grave. On arrival there, Sula offered prayers while Tota watched wistfully. Then she sat near the grave and stared at it with lovelorn eyes for some time. Meanwhile, Sula requested her to make hurry as they were getting late.

Tota mustered all her courage and said to Sula, "Uncle, we did not bring any offering with us. Had we brought even a handful of paddy flakes we could scatter the same over the grave for birds to eat. Can you do me a favour, please? I promise not to bother you ever again, O my darling uncle!"

Sula replied firmly, "You wanted me to show you the grave which I have shown you. If people back home come to know of this, all my life's devotion to your family will be wasted."

Tota assumed a pitiful appearance and said, "Uncle, I promise not to bother you again. Now I have no strength left to ascend the hill to reach the shrine of Makhdoom Sahib. You go to the shrine alone and on your way back bring some paddy flakes. I shall wait for you here. But return quickly; otherwise we shall be late. Daddy will already be getting worried."

Sula was struck dumb. Tota gave him some money and he walked away taking long strides. But he looked back a few times.

When Sula disappeared from view, Tota hugged the grave and wept bitterly, saying, "O my faithful friend! I have come to you after five years. Do stand up. You had told me

in the dream that you were waiting for me. What kind of wait is this? Now that I have come, you have gone to sleep." While weeping and wailing like this she kissed the grave repeatedly with frantic passion. She became tongue-tied and her eyes sank. She picked up two handfuls of dust and then collapsed on this very grave.

Meanwhile, Sula returned from the shrine carrying some paddy flakes in the edge of his *pheran* (long gown). When he saw Tota's condition, the paddy flakes slipped out of his hands and got scattered over the grave and over Tota too. Sula tried hard to bring her back to herself but she did not regain consciousness. Her body was warm. It was, after all, a youthful body. But she lay motionless. Her eyes stared wildly at the grave as if Kostoor would arise from it there and then.

Sula was reduced to a state of shock and hopeless perplexity. He could not decide whether he should rush back home to inform her parents or carry her to some hospital. At that very moment, Kostoor's parents happened to come there. Obviously, they had come to offer prayers at the grave because it was Kostoor's fifth death anniversary. When Sula saw them he heaved a sigh of relief. He thought that he would request them to stay at the spot while he went to inform Tota's parents.

When Kostoor's parents saw Tota lying down like a fallen tree they began to weep loudly. As they went close to her they instantly grasped the bitter truth that Kostoor had, after all, got back what actually belonged to him.

(*Courtesy*: *Koshur Samachar*, New Delhi.)

ROOTS

By Autar Krishan Rahbar

Autar Krishan Rahbar (b. 1933) is among the pioneers of Kashmiri short story. His first story collection *Tobruk* was published in 1958. Since then his stories have appeared regularly in various literary journals. His writings are marked by effective dialogue, an objective stance and subtle satirical strain. During his long association with Radio Kashmir as producer he rendered laudable service to the cause of Kashmiri language. Rahbar has also written a history of Kashmiri literature in Urdu covering the period up to 1800 A.D.

His soul was dishevelled with anguish....

As the heat wave began to swell in Calcutta, his restlessness increased. He was overwhelmed by the feeling that the moment was not far off when he would breathe his last and leave his dismal mortal frame.

In this metropolitan city, the uncanny and unmanageable flood of populace seemed to devour him. A strange, hectic commotion! Fleeing and sprinting shadows! Everyone in a hurry, no one waiting for anyone. A tumultuous uproar pierced the chords of his ears. The whole atmosphere smacked of a heart-rending alienness. The ups and downs of this large city, its colourfulness, cultural grandeur and hullabaloo failed to attract him. He had lost

his identity completely. The pulsating life of fifty-nine years spent by him in Kashmir had suddenly lost its momentum and got frozen.

However, this long spell also had not been quite smooth. The Dogra rulers had yielded place to 'free rulers'. Much water had flown down the Jhelum barrage. He had faced many unpleasant situations. For example, when he recently went to cast his vote, a man standing outside the polling booth told him brusquely, "Panditji, why did you take the trouble of coming here? We have already finished your job. After all, how could we ignore your old age?"

Srikanth got flabbergasted but thought it prudent to keep his cool. His hand involuntarily reached his turban, which he pressed firmly and then scurried into the safety of his home.

Barring such humiliating incidents, he had always felt happy that he had an existence of his own, a distinct personality and a separate identity. Whenever he walked from Ali Kadal to Amira Kadal he was fully conscious that the person tapping the metalled surface of the road with his shoes was none else than Srikanth. Yes, it was he! People greeted him at every step. But here in Calcutta he could not distinguish even between a fly and himself. His demise in this far-off land would not be noticed any more than that of an insect. Who would know who died? On the contrary, his passing away in Kashmir would be a major event. The people of Srinagar would talk about him for days on end. Both Hindus and Muslims would attend his funeral in large numbers.

As he was disturbed by such thoughts, he remembered a painting which depicted a full-grown tree with myriad branches spread on all sides but with all its roots snapped. This very picture met his gaze repeatedly.

Srikanth had three sons, one of whom was serving in Jaipur, the second in Bangalore and the youngest in Calcutta. The eldest of his three daughters was married in

Srinagar. The second was settled in Simla and the third in the U.S. His sons did not occupy good posts and somehow managed to keep the wolf away. They were, like nomads, temporarily lodged in one place today but hardly knowing where fate would take them tomorrow and what would be in store for their children. They had spent quite a lot so far in the shape of rent. At least half their salary was eaten up by accommodation.

Their own hundred-year-old iron-cast house in Srinagar had eleven windows in a row and was yearning for occupants. The fact remained, however, that its roof had by now got dilapidated. Even the walls of the top storey had become weak. But still it was a house to remember. It had been built by Srikanth's father, Ram Kaul, and its hefty beams were the cynosure of everyone living in the locality. The well-baked small tiles used for building the house bore eloquent testimony to the pelf and pomp in which Ram Kaul had spent his life. As *tehsildar* of Chhirat, he had been a virtual maharaja of the area under his jurisdiction. Everyone living in his *mohalla* had a deep and close affinity with this house. It was always kept at the disposal of anyone performing a marriage. Countless wedding parties, of both Hindus and Muslims, had been feted here with sumptuous delicacies.

Ram Kaul's house, in fact, symbolised the honour and prestige of all children living in the *mohalla*. It invariably fulfilled that vital, singular custom after performing which the girls of the locality went to their in-laws' places in distant lands. Each and every girl eagerly waited for that auspicious moment when incense would be burnt in this house in her name, women would sing wedding rhymes, guests would partake of the meals cooked there and finally the bride would accompany her spouse in a car, or go in a *doli*, to join the new phase of their life's journey.

Srikanth vividly remembered all this and then again

visualised the same painting, the same full-grown tree with branches hanging all over but with its roots withered.

On his retirement from service last year he had decided to spend the remaining years of his life in Kashmir itself but circumstances did not favour him. He was forced to take some decisions which he would not have otherwise approved of. Twenty days ago, when he began his train journey to Calcutta, he felt as if he had been seized by the angels of death who, after grabbing both his hands, were dragging him over burning charcoal. This feeling gripped him further when he experienced the intolerable heat of Calcutta. The blasts of *loo* made him to account for his life's acts of omission and commission. He thought that he had been better off as a frog in the well. He woefully apprehended that he would never again be able to return to Kashmir and that his days were numbered.

An unbearable pain was consuming all his limbs. For several days he had been waiting for a letter from his brother. But there was no trace of the same, though he fully believed that his brother would say 'yes' or 'no' within eight or ten days. Then he would send a telegram to his son-in-law in Srinagar for completing the formalities so that the problem could be solved and he would die in peace. But the reply did not come.

"Hope my brother is keeping fit," he wondered. "If his letter does not come today, I shall have to wire him. I am getting consumed from within. To whom can I relate my woes?" He heaved a deep sigh.

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Srikanth had three brothers, one of whom had passed away in the prime of his youth. The second was a top-level officer in Delhi and had built a grand bungalow there. It was through his good offices that Srikanth's sons had found jobs in Jaipur, Bangalore and Calcutta. The third brother

of Srikanth, named Nathji, worked as a teacher and was still living in Kashmir. He had five or six years to go before retirement. He supplemented his meagre income with tuitions to be able to feed his minor children.

Since the demise of his wife two years ago, Srikanth had been depending on Nathji for his culinary needs but he would compensate the family overtly and covertly to the best of his ability. One day when the two brothers were having their evening tea, Srikanth said:

"Do you listen? I have purchased my tickets. I shall leave for Jammu day after tomorrow and from there for Calcutta the following day."

Nathji, taken by surprise, asked him, "Are all keeping well there?"

"Everyone is keeping fit, but not so well."

"What do you mean?"

Srikanth gave no reply but only heaved a deep sigh.

Nathji got worried and asked, "Why don't you say anything?"

"I have received four letters from my son asking me to reach Calcutta forthwith."

"It is okay. You can go during the winter. It must be boiling hot over there at this time," Nathji said.

"I myself had planned it that way, but in view of what he has written I shall have to go right now."

"After all, what is the urgency?"

"As you know, my son and daughter-in-law both leave in the morning to attend to their work. He has a job in a factory and she works as a teacher in some private school. They had put their child in a creche which charged Rs 150 a month. They used to pick up the child from there on their way back home in the evening."

"Yes, but what happened then?"

"Times are not good. According to my son, the creche-

keeper administers some drug to the children to make them fall asleep and he is thus spared the trouble resulting from their wailing. Their child was said to have been in a sad plight and they had almost given up hope of his survival."

"It is so strange!" said Nathji. "They should now put him in some other creche. All creches are not mismanaged."

"It is not that simple. They are very frightened. In case the child's mother gives up her job, how will they manage with seven to eight hundred rupees? They must be paying four hundred as rent alone. I shall go even if I have to work as a domestic hand at the fag-end of my life."

Both of them stared at each other and both kept silent for a while. Then Srikanth opened his mouth:

"Migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the State has assumed alarming proportions. Had he secured a job here I would not find myself in this sorry state now. I had made doleful entreaties to each and every officer but it was no use... All our landed property was taken over without compensation in the guise of reforms and we were, so to say, clean-shaven. Reforms as such are acceptable to me too but the way they gobbled up our lands is simply atrocious. The other day I had been to my daughter's house. You should have seen how her husband and three brothers-in-law along with their families are huddled together in rooms not bigger than pigeon holes. The poor fellows once possessed twenty to thirty *kanals* of land but they were not wise enough to set apart a piece of land on which they could build a large house later."

While saying this Srikanth became so sentimental that his face was red with rage.

"Take the case of my second son, who is in Bangalore. God alone knows how he will be managing. He has two daughters of marriageable age — I have to face embarrassment in the last moments of my life. The one in Jaipur does not communicate with me at all. He must be

apprehensive that if he writes to me I might go and stay with him. But I am not dependent on anyone. The pension money that I receive should suffice me till my death."

Fathoming his disturbed mood, Nathji preferred to change the topic of conversation.

"Will you have another cup of tea?"

"Why not? The boiling cauldron has spilled over me." Srikanth's tone became bitter and harsher. After a pause he said again, "I had been thinking of something else. Actually, I wanted to tell you about that only."

Nathji was bewildered and asked what it was.

"I was wondering if we could dispose of this house. Our brother in Delhi has not so far disclosed what he wants to do with his share. Tomorrow I shall pass away and I know my blood relations well. My last rites will still be going on when they will auction the house. That is why I would like to see this matter settled during my lifetime. Then the dispute will not linger on indefinitely and no scorpions will bite me in my next birth."

Nathji was taken aback. He felt this decision to be somewhat premature and sudden. But it enabled him to realise the bitter truth to some extent. His whole body was filled with gruelling pain as if he had been bitten by a toad. He wondered where he would go with his wife and minor children.

Srikanth understood his predicament fully. He had served in the Accounts Department and not wasted his life. With an air of farsight, he said to Nathji, "I realise your helplessness. Just think if all of us sell the house jointly it will fetch two lakhs but if each one of us goes it alone no buyer will offer a penny more than twenty-five thousand. Nowadays nobody can afford to live with an alien in the same house, especially when the entrance is common, the corridor is common, the staircase is common and even the walls of the rooms are common."

"That's correct," said Nathji with all modesty and regard. "Who knows where my children will get settled. It is a matter of only some years. I shall have retired by then and I too shall follow them bag and baggage."

Srikanth replied, "That is true but I don't think I shall last that long. Actually, it is not my life that matters. The fair name of Ram Kaul should not get besmeared. Again, if any member of the family leaves us in the lurch, what will you do?"

Nathji was stunned. He could not utter a word for quite sometime. Meanwhile, Srikanth got up, stretched his *pheran* and said, "Think it over at leisure. Both of you decide what can be good for us and what will harm us. I shall leave day after tomorrow. You may write to me after a week or so. I have two buyers in view; one is willing to purchase the whole house and the other is ready to pay fifty thousand for my share. Both of them are Muslims. I shall also write to my brother in Delhi asking him what he proposes to do with his share."

After saying these words, Srikanth started walking to his room.

"Oh no, don't go like that. Have your meals first," said Nathji mustering all his courage. "Please sit down and take your food. Whatever has to happen cannot be averted."

"Yes, whatever is destined will come surely", Srikanth agreed. But his head was reeling. He regretted that today he had to do what he could never have imagined.

Nathji again requested him to sit down.

"No, I don't have an appetite and I have a headache too. I want to sleep", said Srikanth walking into his room. He closed the door, switched off the light and got into his bed. That same painting was revolving before his eyes. That tree sans roots, which had been torn off by saws big and small.

In his childhood Srikanth had heard that the

Shankaracharya Hill was a silent volcano that would erupt some day and spread its lava in the neighbourhood causing devastation all over! But the hill did not erupt all these fifty-nine years, though at times he had felt that lava was oozing out of it. Today, however, he was sure that the Shankaracharya Hill had erupted fully, its lava was sprouting forth and the whole sky was filled with mist, clouds and smoke.

***

He did not receive any letter today also. He thought that he would ask his son to send a telegram to Nathji. But how could he talk about Kashmir in the presence of his son and daughter-in-law? Whenever he had tried to do so, they had assailed him like mad dogs, saying, "So far as we are concerned, you may burn down the property we have there."

Srikanth got up, somehow straggled up to the telegraph office and sent the following message:

"Worried. Wire welfare... Srikanth."

Three more days passed. He spent the nights as if he was lying on pointed nails. Strange thoughts filled his mind.

"Woe is me! Hope they have not committed suicide. They will certainly ensure hell for Ram Kaul. I should not have taken such a decision. After my death, they could do as they liked."

A state like that of lunacy overtook him. He thought that if he did not receive a reply within a week or so he would write to his brother that he had changed his decision. His eyes were glued to the door and he constantly thought about his brother. His heart was filled with deep anguish.

A telegraphic reply, brief and curt, came from Nathji. Srikanth was elated as if he had got all the world's wealth. The telegram said, "All well. Detailed letter posted five days ago."

However, he could not decide whether he should feel happy or sad. He again fell into a hundred reveries. He could not guess what Nathji would have said in his letter. While he was still making surmises, the letter landed.

Srikanth took the envelope from the postman. He recognised the handwriting of Nathji. He was happy that his brother was still obedient to him. He loved him all the more for this. But while opening the envelope his whole body trembled, his heart began palpitating fast and his eyesight waned. When he pulled the letter out of the cover, he at first felt that the paper was blank, unclear and empty. But that was not the case. The letter had been formally written.

Srikanth cleansed his glasses. At first he could see only some image-like characters but then all words became clearly decipherable. After a pause, he began reading each and every word slowly:

> "Dear brother,
>
> "Namaskar. May you live long!
>
> "I perfectly understand the quandary you are in. I also realise that my brother, who brought me up like his own son and taught me to think independently, must be right in his judgment. What he says must be both plausible and correct. But please think for a while as to where I shall go with my wife and minor children.
>
> "Nevertheless, you may certainly dispose of your share of the property to whomsoever you like. Why are you worried for me? By the way, which community inhabits the locality in which I live? With whom do I spend the day? Who ferries me across the river? Who removes the nightsoil from my house? Who grows the flowers which I use for *puja*? When I was born, who

was my midwife? When I die, who will stoke the flames of my pyre? You should cease to worry about us. May God bless you!

"Your own,
"Nathji"

Srikanth read the letter over and over again. His eyes turned blood-red. In a fit of rage he shouted, "Bloody fool! He has lost his senses."

He tore the letter into shreds and threw the pieces out of the window. He became very restless. His heart beat furiously. His mind was filled with apprehensions. The same painting began to dance in front of his eyes. Sometimes the snapped roots were soaring high and the branches going down. At times the branches were rising skyward and the roots going down. He felt as if the tree was about to crash... It would fall any moment. His heart beat faster than ever and he fell down unconscious. After two hours he came to his own but his general condition was deteriorating.

After some days, his son-in-law having completed the formalities of sale, sent him the cheque. A letter accompanying it said that another cheque had been sent to Srikanth's brother in Delhi.

The letter also revealed that Nathji too had, only after one week, sold his share to the same person, Qadir Joo, who had bought their two shares. Nathji was now living in a rented house.

Srikanth's fading eyes instantly turned into two craters from which his hidden heat and molten lava began to gush forth.

(*Courtesy*: *Shiraza*, Srinagar.)

ME AND MYSELF

By Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din

Akhtar Mohi-ud-Din (b. 1928) is acclaimed as the topmost fiction writer of Kashmir. He has to his credit two novels, two collections of short stories and a few plays. His first collection of short stories, *Sath Sangar* (Seven Pinnacles), won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958. Later, he was awarded the Padmashri by the Government of India. He excels in skilful handling of emotional situations and can use humour, irony and sarcasm with telling effect.

I was listening to his dissertation. Perhaps he could not help saying what he said and, ostensibly, I too had no choice but to hear him. According to him, my bones were getting filled with coal-dust fire and my veins and arteries were squirming with poison. Still I was intently listening, while he spoke:

"You get fits of epilepsy. Suddenly your face turns black like soot. You twist your lips and crack your teeth. You shiver violently and then collapse on the floor gasping for breath like a poisoned dog. The corners of your mouth touch your ears and your mouth gets filled with froth-like foam in soap water!"

His eyes were all aglow like flames as he continued:

"I alone know when this disease gripped you. Do you

remember that night long ago when you had a dream? How sweet it was! Its hangover had lasted quite some time. You dreamt as if you had become a king. Your chest was encased in a coat-of-arms to protect it from the enemy's dart. The golden crown on your head blinked at the heavenly dome. Your bare thighs were enveloped by iron chains and your ankles covered with steel plates. Bracelets inlaid with pearls and emeralds adorned your arms. A sword hung by your side. You had a mace on your right shoulder and a bow on the left. A bunch of arrows with poisoned points was perched on your back. You caught hold of your enemy, floored him and, after trampling his chest under your foot, indulged in a hearty guffaw — such a boisterous laugh that shook the palace. After that, you addressed yourself as 'Emperor of the World'.

"You woke up in the morning. Your throat was dry as dust and you quenched your thirst. But your heart was heavy because the dream had been cut short. Its haunting memory had, like wine, got absorbed in your veins which were vibrating like the strings of a musical instrument. The joy was gushing in waves within your body. Your face beamed red and your eyes sparkled. You were wondering whether you could really become a king — an all-conquering monarch! Such a possibility seemed to exist, considering the meagre distance between wakefulness and sleep — and sleep offered the golden dream.

"Every night you would repair to your bed in the firm belief of becoming the monarch that night but the next morning you would get up disappointed. The whole night you would get nothing but the darkness of a deep slumber."

He was dissserting and I was all attention. He went on:

"Then, one night, fortune smiled on you. You dreamt that you possessed four arms — long, plump and round, and bedecked with gold ornaments. You had deadly weapons in your hands, a crown on your head, a serpent round your neck and the enemy trampled under your bare legs. The foe

lay upside down with one of your feet on his back. Your second foot was raised in such a posture as if ready to deal with any other possible enemy or enemies, who would never be able to match your prowess. You felt like hearing the loud report of the drum or the bang of the *thali* so that you could dance with gay abandon, a dance sans beginning or end, sans constraints or inhibitions.

"But something happened and you began to entertain doubts: 'Am I not dreaming? Do I actually have four arms? Is the enemy really lying trampled under my feet? If it is not a dream, why is the drum not being beaten? Again, why don't I enter the realm of wakefulness along with the dream and carry it with me overwhelming the whole universe?' — At this stage there was a bang, not of the *thali* but the sound produced by some article flung by the cat from the open vault in the wall. You were awakened by this sound. You tried to get up and carry the dream with you, but in vain. Then, in a jiffy, you tried to get back into the dream world but that too was not possible. Finally you came into your own only to feel disappointed.

"Both your arms had become emaciated. Your head was in a whirl. Your abdomen was thundering. You had become so weak that any enemy could annihilate you, cut you into smithereens. It dawned on you for the first time that you had had these dreams only during nights when the previous evening you had partaken of some unsavoury or disagreeable dish. With this realisation you got disgusted because that day too you had a stomach upset."

He was saying this in a manner as if he could not do without it and I was consciously all ears to him. While listening to the discourse, my veins and arteries were aching with poison and coal-dust fire was consuming my marrow. But I heard all that he said:

"Although this realisation taught you to distinguish between dreams and wakefulness, still you were lured by the sweet candy of you dream — the sword dangling by your

side, the mace on your shoulder, the uncanny strength of your muscles and the enemy lying trampled under your feet. For winning these laurels, you ate even such stuff that did not suit you.

"Then, one day, you again had a dream. I know what you had eaten the previous evening. You dreamt as if you had been transformed into a frog hopping on two hands and two feet. You were jumping on all fours in a bid to cross the blazing tarred road in the hot sun. The coal-tar on the hot surface of the road bit your hands, feet and belly. You panted for rest but some impulse drove you ahead. You seemed to be in a hurry to reach the other end. Meanwhile, a lorry appeared from afar. Its wheels were revolving fast. It was lacerating the curtains of time and piercing the moorless wind. You perhaps realised that the road rightfully belonged to the lorry and not to you, and so made a last-minute effort to cross over. But alas! One of the wheels crushed your back and sped away without knowing that you had got stuck to it.

"While no harm came to the apathetic wheel, you uttered a pathetic cry. Your arms and legs trembled, the corners of your mouth touched your ears, your mouth was filled with froth and you panted like a poisoned dog. Since that day you feel scared of sleep and shudder at the very thought of having a dream."

I was listening to what he said. Instantly, the poison in my veins began to boil. The coal-dust fire in the marrow of my bones leapt high in flames. I stood up like the burning effigy of wrathful Ravana and caught hold of the person who was making harangue to me in this disdainful manner. I lifted him with my bare hands and dashed him to the ground. Then, as I was about to trample over his chest and designate myself as 'Emperor of the World', all of a sudden darkness engulfed everything — and total reticence.

The following day, in the adjoining room, my wife was

talking to the doctor or the neighbour, or perhaps to herself, in a very relaxed fashion. She said:

"He was sitting there all right when he suddenly got up, grabbed the mirror hanging on the wall and dashed it against the floor. Then he collapsed and got into a fit of epilepsy."

(*Courtesy*: *Pratibha India*, Delhi.)

WHERE LOVE IS SCARCE

By Bashir Akhtar

Bashir Akhtar (b. 1944), one of the torch-bearers of the younger generation of Kashmiri writers, is essentially progressive in his outlook and art. In his delectable short stories he has identified himself with the cause of the downtrodden and presented a realistic picture of the social order in his native land. His work is marked by a rare sense of humour and sarcasm.

As the jeep reached the police station, the driver changed gear. The engine roared and a long blast of smoke gushed out through the silencer. The driver was ready to shift his foot from the clutch to the accelerator so as to drive on through the gate when in a loud voice the Deputy Superintendent Sarbuland Khan asked him to halt.

The driver was caught unawares. His right foot went mechanically to the brake instead of to the accelerator. The jeep obeyed the order and stood still.

Khan Sahib reached his hand to the dash-board and picked up his cane. He then came out of the jeep, removed his pick cap and depositing it in his left armpit marched in through the main gate.

The sentry posted at the gate saluted him as usual with such loud tapping of his boot that the birds perched on the nearby pomegranate tree were scared away. Even then it

seemed that Khan Sahib did not either hear the loud report or ignored it and went ahead. The cops sitting in the corridor got alerted and a silence as of the graveyard overtook the whole police station.

Khan Sahib went into his room banging the door behind him. After sitting in the chair he pressed the call-bell which, however, did not ring. He pressed the button again but with no result.

"Bastards," he muttered. It was not clear whether he was referring to his orderly or to the Electricity Department, because when he looked up at the wall the light was off while the orderly was standing at the door as motionless as a statue.

"Call the *havildar*," he said fretfully. The orderly did a right about turn and was ready to step out when another command came: "And listen".

The orderly turned back, brought his hands down and stood like a log.

"Have you brought the thing I wanted?" said Khan Sahib with his eyes cast down. The *havildar*, on hearing this, stood at ease and walked up to the table in that position. Picking a pin from the pin-cushion he cleaned his right ear with it. Then he smiled and said, "That has been lying here for long, sir."

"Good, very good," said Khan Sahib and nodded too. "In the whole establishment, you are the only useful hand."

"So kind of you, sir," grinned the orderly baring his dirty teeth and gums.

"It is all right," said Khan Sahib meaning that the orderly should quit now.

When the orderly left, Khan Sahib picked the papers lying in the tray on his right. He had a cursory look at them and then put them back in the tray. Blinking his eyes he scanned the whole of the table top. Everything was in order — pen-stand, paper-weight, pin-cushion, blotter and

glass. Under the glass lay a group photograph which bore this caption in clear language:

> 'Lest we forget. On the occasion of the transfer of DSP Raja S.B. Khan.'

Inexplicably, Khan Sahib heaved a sigh. The glass covering the photograph had a round blot in one corner resembling a circle drawn by some child with the compass, which he later fills with colours. He passed his finger slowly over the blotted portion. He felt that the spot was rough. He remembered that only the other day he had placed a hot cup of tea at that very place when he had to entertain three guests at his own cost.

"A useless beggarly village!" he bemoaned with anger and turned the chair round with a jerk. Then he looked again at the glass only to find that the blot had vanished.

Khan Sahib was astonished. He bent down and looked at the table top from a different angle. Lo! The blot was still there, shining brightly in the light coming from the window. Inadvertently, he lifted the paper-weight and rubbed the glass with it. The rubbing produced some scratches on the glass around the blotted spot. Khan Sahib caught hold of the paper-weight with three fingers and using the full force of his hand spun it into a whirl. The paper-weight revolved like a top on the smooth surface of the glass. While rotating, it took a few somersaults over the caption of the group photograph and then raced down to land on the planked floor with a bang.

Khan Sahib reclined, lit a cigarette and taking a long puff closed his eyes.

Before his transfer to this place, he had spent eight years in the city. Fortune had smiled on him. Even earlier, he had always got prize postings. In the city, motor vehicles plied all the day, shops remained open until midnight and people thronged cinema houses. There were noisy crowds in

front of the vendors selling roasted meat-sticks, jostling and pushing passing women and cracking dirty jokes at them. In short, one tumult surpassed another and cases were registered at the police station in quick succession. Khan Sahib remained occupied round the clock with complainants flocking to his office as well as to his residence.

"What a poor substitute this accursed village is!" he heaved a sigh. "If a filthy rural woman goes round the village with a basketful of cowdung on her head who will care to molest her and whom can we haul up?"

Khan Sahib's children studied in a public school and were used to a high style of living. They could have anything for the asking. They lived in a spacious bungalow situated in a posh colony. Guests dropped in throughout the day and a contingent of servants remained in attendance.

The DSP again picked up the papers kept in the tray, examined them one by one and finding them of no use twisted them with his hand and threw them down saying, "All trash. There is nothing in them."

Meanwhile, the *havildar* appeared at the door and sought permission to come in.

"Where were you all the time?" Khan Sahib asked in an angry mood.

"Sir..." the *havildar* tried to explain but the DSP cut him short saying, "Shut up!"

Khan Sahib got up and took a few steps around the table. Then he picked up the twisted paper bundle from the floor and threw it at the *havildar*'s face. Displaying his clenched fists, he roared, "Have you called me here for these trivial matters? How many years have you been in service?"

The *havildar* replied, "Eight years, sir."

"Stand erect."

The *havildar* obeyed. He stiffened his neck, centred his gaze at one point and stood motionless like a snowman. Then

he submitted, "Sir, this is a small village and very few crimes are committed here. Then the residents of the village..."

Khan Sahib again interrupted him, "There is no need for any explanation." He then walked to the window on the west, had a look at the distant landscape and turning round told the *havildar*, "Is this a habitat of the dead? Can't anyone here lose even a rooster?"

The *havildar* drew a long face and then looked out of the window. The sky was still overcast. The plateau was filled all over with grass made luxuriant by the last night's rain. It was lush green, fresh and clean.

The cattle owned by the villagers grazed in this pasture. On one side, under the shade of a tree, stood a snow-white mare. It was as beautiful as an Arabian steed, tall and robust. Its front legs had been tied together to restrict its movement. For picking blades of grass it had first to hop forward on its front legs and then move its hind legs.

It was evident that the mare was accustomed to walking with its front legs tied up. Despite this, the *havildar* felt that such 'cruelty' constituted a cognisable offence warranting interference by the police.

When Khan Sahib enquired a second time whether no one in the village could lose even a hen, the *havildar* said in a subdued tone, "Yes, sir, this can happen definitely." Then he saluted Khan Sahib and walked away.

***

What ensued can be summed up as follows:

Rasool Dar was a horse-owner. He somehow managed to make both ends meet. He would bring a horseload of firewood from the nearby forest and sell it to keep the wolf away from his door.

This occupation he had been following for years. He possessed a mare which he loved dearly.

After finishing the day's chores, he used to set the mare free to graze in the pasture. He would, of course, tie its front legs to prevent it from straying into anyone's vegetable garden. There were vast expanses of common grazing land. The mare would have its fill and return home by nightfall.

Last night, when the mare did not come home until past midnight, Rasool Dar got worried. Accompanied by his wife and children and with a lantern in hand he went round the plateau barefooted. Then the family returned and searched the cattlesheds of all the villagers. He even enquired from the passersby but there was no trace of the animal.

In the morning, Rasool Dar, after careful consultation with his family members, proceeded to the police station to lodge a complaint. When the uniformed clerk heard his plea, he laughed in his sleeves. Picking his pen he said, "Have you a cigarette?"

Being a poor rustic, Rasool Dar was not used to smoking cigarettes. Of course, he puffed at the hookah at home. So he replied in the negative.

The clerk stared at him with disgust and his mood underwent a sudden change. "Why did you come here with your tale of woe? Are we your father's servants?"

Rasool Dar got flabbergasted and was about to cry when another constable lambasted him, "Who told you to sit in the chair? Go and squat near the door."

Rasool Dar got up quietly, walked out and sat on the cemented staircase.

Meanwhile, a third policeman rushed in, gasping for breath. Rubbing his hands he said to the clerk, "Sir, there is no trace of both wire and holder."

The clerk cast a glance at Rasool Dar, then hinted something to the cop and said with the assumed air of an SHO, using abusive language, "Search the pockets of that son of an ass. He has come here with an innocent look. It is he who must have stolen the electric bulb at night."

He had hardly uttered these words when the two constables pounced on Rasool Dar as vultures swoop down on a corpse. They tore his clothes to shreds, slapped him till his face bled and then threw him out of the gate as if he was a dead dog.

The man who accosted Rasool Dar outside the police station was apparently a godsend. After hearing about his plight, he said, "Have policemen ever been moved by tears? You do one thing..." But without suggesting the way out, he posed a question, "Have you got any money?"

Rasool Dar said, "No". The man moistened his lips and whispered in his ear, "Do you know Satar Janda who runs a tea-stall in that corner?" Rasool Dar was intrigued and replied, "Yes, I know him very well. His sister is married to me", he added shyly.

"In that case, you have nothing to worry. Our boss is his close friend. You might have occasionally seen him in his shop."

"No, sir. I did not have any idea of this. Many thanks for telling me," said Rasool Dar with folded hands. He felt happy that his prospective saviour happened to be his own man. Brushing his beard with his hand, he walked back home gleefully. His wife was beside herself with joy when she learnt about the influence wielded by her brother. She filled a brand new *kangri* with sweets and made straight for her parental home.

The tea-shop of Satar Janda being in close vicinity to the police station, cops used to frequent it throughout the day. The village bumpkins too visited the shop. Satar and the *havildar* were so friendly that they often jestingly pushed and punched each other.

Early morning on the following day, Satar Janda and Rasool Dar went to Khan Sahib's official residence. Satar walked straight into his drawing room, leaving Rasool Dar outside.

Rasool Dar was by now convinced that things were going smoothly by the grace of God. He said to himself, "The police might show mercy on me and make a search for the mare." But when he saw Satar coming out of the house haggard and woebegone, his heart sank.

Satar Janda heaved a deep sigh and said, "Don't you know a policeman does not spare even his father? He can rob even his sister's husband of his pyjamas. The DSP was demanding a sum of Rs 1600 for starting investigations." Explaining the point further, he continued, "The fact remains that we don't know who stole the mare. Had we any suspicion we could cite the names of a few persons. In that case, we have to pay only Rs 500."

A word of advice followed, "Now you do one thing. In your statement you mention at least three persons as probable culprits. If you do that, then you will have to pay only Rs 800 in all. The police will themselves search for the mare and we will be spared the trouble of going from pillar to post."

Rasool Dar got his statement recorded just as the police ordered him to do. In fact, the clerk himself drafted it. Rasool merely affixed his thumb impression on the paper.

A carpenter named Rahim was Rasool Dar's neighbour. While he himself was a gentleman of sorts, his son was a man of the world, donned the attire of a city youth and applied perfume to his hair. In the evening, when the family members sat chatting in their house there was a sudden call from outside. Rahim's wife was the first to come out. Her womanly intuition led her to suspect that her son must have committed some misdeed. On seeing the policeman in her courtyard she turned pale with fear. She beat her breast and began cursing her son. The boy swore by God pleading his innocence, but his entreaties fell on deaf ears.

At last, the carpenter went to the police station and paid a sum of Rs 500 to ensure his son's freedom and safety.

The matter was closed but he never forgot the manner in which Rasool Dar had stabbed him in the back.

The second person implicated by Rasool Dar was named Samad Munna. When he returned home after depositing the hush money at the police station, his wife raised hell. Pulling down her muslin headgear she prayed to God to inflict some calamity on Rasool Dar.

When the third man, Samad Garatal, was also summoned by the police for no fault of his, he did not take it lying down. Instead, he called a meeting of the village panchayat at which Rasool Dar was censured and served with an ultimatum that in case he persisted in involving the children of innocent people in false cases, the villagers would be forced to think of excommunicating him.

Rasool Dar was in an unenviable position. He had lost his mare and money. He had become a pauper due to lack of work. On top of this all, he had to face the reprimand of the village and ignominy. The poor man felt like committing suicide. He shed tears of blood and begged the pardon of village elders by laying his cap at their feet and kissing their soles. He publicly vowed not to visit the police station again even if he had to face starvation. He could work as a day-labourer to earn his food but where would he find shelter for his family in case he was asked to leave the village for good?

Rasool Dar not only made this solemn promise but also kept it to the last word. He swallowed the poison of the loss of his mare and started work as a daily wager.

There is the famous story of an old man clasped by a bear. The man wanted to free himself but the bear would not loosen its grip. Though Rasool Dar strove to get detached from the clutches of the police, they would not leave him so easily.

After a fortnight, a constable came to his house at noon when Rasool Dar was sitting near the window ruminating

over his sad plight. The cop called out his name in a very loud voice and said, "Come to the police station. They have found your mare!" In a jiffy, all the village elders saw the snow-white mare actually standing in the police station compound. But it did not look as healthy as it used to. It lacked all vigour. Rasool Dar went near it but could not believe that it was his mare. However, when the mare saw its master it furiously pulled at the rope which fastened it to the tether. Khan Sahib was convinced that the mare belonged to Rasool Dar.

A villager queried the DSP, "Sir, where did you find it?"

Khan Sahib shouted back, "What have you to do with that? Your purpose is served. Isn't that enough?"

"Yes, it is," another villager said cutting short the matter. Rasool Dar placed his cap at the feet of the DSP.

Intriguingly, Khan Sahib in a show of anger turned back with a jerk and walked into his office. The villagers felt small and regretted their behaviour. They made entreaties to him to forgive them for having questioned him. It was ultimately decided that all the village elders would sign the following press release thanking the police:

> We, the residents of the village, heartily thank Raja Sarbuland Khan and all concerned functionaries of the police station for the help ungrudgingly rendered by them to us in times of trial and tribulation. They never gave us a chance to grumble.
>
> SD/- RESIDENTS OF THE VILLAGE, THROUGH THE LAMBARDAR.

On the following Monday, Haji Aziz Wani, the headman of a neighbouring village, visited the police station to demand payment of the expenditure incurred by him for feeding the mare during the period it was supposed to be missing. Raja Sarbuland Khan flew into a rage and showered

abuses on him. The *lambardar* was trembling with fear.

With blood-red eyes, the DSP said to him, "How dare you come to me to ask for such expenses? Don't you know it is a crime to keep someone else's horse in wrongful and hidden custody for such a long period?"

The *lambardar* argued, "But, Sir, God's wrath may fall on me if I hid the mare. It was brought to my house at midnight by your own man who said you had ordered me to tie the animal in the cattle shed and keep a strict watch over it. He also told me that the money spent by me would be reimbursed to the last penny."

After saying this, he took out a piece of paper from his pocket. "This is the full account. The total comes to Rs 88. Please tell me what sin I have committed."

Khan Sahib swallowed the bitter pill. He pulled at the *lambardar*'s blanket and said to him, "Get up and identify the constable who went to your house."

"Sir, I could not see his face as it was pitch dark", was the *lambardar*'s reply.

"You might have been blind but we are not," said Khan Sahib taunting the *lambardar*. He then turned towards his staff and gave the following order:

"Let all policemen, one by one, pull out the hair of this old rogue's beard."

(*Courtesy*: *Indian Literature*.)

THE AGONY OF LOSS

By Autar Krishan Razdan

Autar Krishan Razdan is an eminent short story writer of Kashmir. He was born in Srinagar in 1942 but has been polio-stricken since infancy. However, this infirmity has not stood in the way of his notable literary activity. He is well-educated, having passed his M.A. in Hindi from Kashmir University in 1962. He has to his credit half a dozen short story collections in Hindi, besides numerous articles on Kashmiri culture and literature published in various literary journals of India. He has recently switched over to Kashmiri with a collection of delectable short stories entitled *L.B.W.* and has won awards from Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, Delhi and Jammu. The U.P. Hindi Sansthan, Lucknow, gave him a *Tamrapatra* and a cash award of Rs 10,000 in 1990. His work is distinguished by deep observation of human suffering, simple diction and sizzling satire.

The duration of man's lifespan is preordained. Depending on his past Karma, each soul has to spend some days in this world and then finally leave its earthly frame behind. This is the natural process, a natural law which no mortal has ever been able to change.

For the past three years Shamlal had been haranguing with everyone on this subject. He had, so to say, been

stopping the gushing pain of his heart with the support of a boulder. This gave him great relief. He analysed the phenomenon of life and death like a celebrated philosopher. Since the demise of his wife, Sedha Lakshmi, he told all and sundry that he had not suffered any loss. It was her own fate, how could he stop it?

However, as time went by he started feeling harassed and woebegone. He became conscious of an intense feeling of deprivation but couldn't explain in words what actually he had lost. Even if he sometimes tried to recollect it he did not succeed. He only became tongue-tied and his whole body bathed in perspiration. Then he retired into a dream-like state. Even otherwise, he would always put this question to himself: "Can such a loss be made good again?"

But a miracle occurred today and, for a few seconds, he seemed to have got back the lost 'treasure' entrusted to him by someone. Time retraced its ruthless steps and he felt just like a passerby who unwittingly drops something at a particular spot on the way, walks ahead for a while and then happens to return to the same spot to find that thing again. The moment he got this feeling, copious tears trickled down his cheeks and his whole body shivered like a dry leaf. What caused this sudden transformation? Had he not so far accepted birth and death only as God's will — nothing but a miracle in human existence? He never got elated when a baby was born, nor dreaded death. But what he regained today left him dumbfounded. He hurriedly repaired to his room, squatted against the wall with a cushion at his back and cast a vacant look through the window only to find the gaping blue sky gazing at him.

Today was the third death anniversary of Sedha Lakshmi. She had passed away exactly three years ago. Shamlal could not realise how fast this long period wafted away on the wings of time. It was like counting days as fast as one counts walnuts. It was the call of time and God's wish, which cannot be altered. Only man's mind, his thoughts

and his boundless love can undergo change. But in old age mind gets boggled, ideas seem to clash automatically — and what of love? An old man can give the best in him for anyone who serves him but can feel immensely hurt if he is chucked away. Like a child, he feels nearer to one who hails him with affection but shies away from one who frowns at him as if he is a stranger. If he loses even an ordinary thing he feels that the most precious acquisition of his life has vanished in a jiffy. In case he finds anything that he might have given up as gone, he loves it more fondly than his life. That explains the old adage: "A child and an old man are on the same mental wave-length."

Shamlal too had lost the sum and substance of his life — his wife Sedha Lakshmi. In the beginning, he did not feel her separation at all but for the last two months he had become aware of the intense agony of this loss. He felt as if a boulder had been placed on his heart. He became helpless and needy. Today he found his cherished thing which he had lost at some place on the way and which he saw lying at the same spot on his return journey after some time.

Upon Sedha Lakshmi's death three years ago the whole house had reverberated with cries, sobs and moans. Her daughters and daughters-in-law, kith and kin wept bitterly. Had she not reared them with love? All those present tried to console Shamlal who, they felt, had now got isolated, with none to talk to. But Shamlal was not shaken at all, nor was he in mourning. He felt emancipated, sans any loss. He took the happening philosophically by explaining to his near and dear ones thus: "No two spouses have remained unseparated till their last breath. One of them — man or woman — must take precedence over the other. Even otherwise, Sedha Lakshmi's demise was exemplary. She was fortunate to have two sons and a daughter, all married and settled down happily. Her greatest distinction was that she departed ahead of her husband." With such thoughts crowding his

mind, he too put Ganga water in the mouth of his wife and followed her cortege up to the cremation ground.

Shamlal now felt like a free bird. His daily routine consisted of spending the afternoon in a park with his contemporaries, holding evening *darbars* on shop-edges discussing politics as well as domestic problems, indulging in hair-splitting over non-issues, besides eulogising the old and disparaging the new. When he was in service he never exhibited such preoccupation; he could always be found at home after four. But nowadays he was not available at his house at any hour and none in the family knew his whereabouts. How could anyone trace him? He might be sitting in some shop or in the house of some relative. His children were fed up with his changed behaviour and he was not welcomed even by his relations.

One day his elder son, Nathji, told him complainingly that what he called freedom was nothing but detachment and frustration born of sadness.

Shamlal replied confidently: "No, it is neither freedom nor frustration, it is only a way to pass days in old age."

Nathji shot back: "Can't you pass these days within the bounds of your home and hearth, together with your kith and kin like a good householder?"

Shamlal closed his eyes for a while. He instantly got a beautiful panoramic view of his household: "Nathji, his wife Kamla, the elder daughter-in-law and mother of four children; his second son Mohanji and his wife Kuki; and his lone daughter Asha. He was shaken out of his stupor and realised that what he was doing was not correct; people must be mocking him for this. In fact, why should a family man indulge in such gimmicks? But was Nathji's judgement of Shamlal being frustrated true? No, he was only feeling free.

Was he really free?... He heaved a deep sigh. Today, after three years of 'freedom', he was still feeling enslaved, helpless and without trust. His own children appeared to

him as strangers and vice versa. He had actually become sad as a result of the change creeping into the domestic environment for the past three months. He was intensely conscious of the loss he had suffered in the death of his life-partner, his very flesh and blood.

But has anyone again found such a lost companion? He knew the answer very well. Such a loss is felt more deeply in old age when man's brain fails to perform normally, when the unspun threads of ideas get twisted and when the soft and delicate yearnings of the heart are sacked and plundered. Anyone losing his mate at this stage of life can be compared only to a distraught bird whose wings have been clipped, who forgets its warbling and haplessly writhes in pain inside its cage.

Since the day when Shamlal stopped wandering out of his house, he felt like an inmate of a closed prison cell. Even the four walls of his bedroom seemed poised to devour him. If on any occasion he left his house stealthily he had to hustle back due to the fear of Nathji. He could not draw any satisfaction from the one-hour jaunt.

He would again repair to his room, squat on the floor against the wall with a cushion at his back in the same old despicable and forlorn condition. In the evening, Nathji would stop outside the door of his room, have a routine cursory look at him and then proceed to his own room.

Mohanji, who had by now become a big officer, did not at all care for his father. In fact, he had become oblivious to the fact that his father was still alive. But, in a way, he was not to blame for this. The exigencies of his job made him leave his home before dawn and return only after dusk. How could he find time to meet his father? The daughters-in-law of the house too were very busy and Shamlal caught a glimpse of them only occasionally. When his sons did not bother about him, what business his daughters-in-law could have to attend on him?

Shamlal was, day after day, brooding over his predicament. "Why am I being treated as a stranger? They are, after all, my children whom I have procreated and brought up with utmost care. How dare they take me for an alien? (May they die in their youth!) Actually, a man should not get overaged because he then feels that his own kin are like jailors and his home is nothing but a prison."

However, he suddenly realised that it was not a prison but his own room where he was sitting at the moment. This room had four walls and a ceiling but he was feeling lonely here. Though he was a chain smoker, today he had got fed up even with his hookah which was lying in front of him. He was pining for company. He needed someone to whom he could pour out his heart's agony. After the death of his wife he had not got stuck for any work. He managed to look after himself as far as possible. His only problem was lack of company. Whenever Sedha Lakshmi sat in this room with him, every other family member frequented the place and he too remained busy. But today it was quite different; everyone treated him as a stranger and nobody dropped in. He wondered if he had ever spoken harshly to the children and if they were angry with him. Is an old man welcome only till his wife is alive? Does he lose all shine with her death? No, that cannot be the case because birth and death depend on the will of God. Their timing is predetermined and unalterable.

These random, disturbing thoughts gave him a headache. His eyes got a burning sensation. He was dying for a cup of tea. It was already past four o'clock, his fixed hour for tea. If he did not get tobacco or tea on time he would be driven mad. However, he had shown remarkable patience today in the hope that his cup of tea would arrive soon. But that was not to be.

"Everyday Kuki brings me tea at exact four; why is she so late today? Now it is nearing six and nobody seems to be

bothered about my tea. I hope everyone is O.K. By the way, why is there such a bustle on the staircase? Where is Kuki?

"That busy bee Kuki; she is always in a hurry. She too is lethargic, depending on servants and maids. She does not listen to anyone and she is haughty... Only, the time is to blame. I selected this pauper girl for my son and gave her food and clothing. Her father, Soda Joo, was very fortunate to have found such a good household for her... Actually God looks after every soul. Why should I lambast her for nothing? It is only because an old man feels hurt if he does not get his cup of tea on time. However, I am answerable to God: she never shuns her duty. But why is she late today? Is she feeling all right?

"I fail to understand why she trims her hair. All think she has become a madam. It is not her fault, however, because otherwise her husband won't take her to parties. But why should I bother? It is their own problem. I consider Kuki as my own daughter. I hope she is O.K. She is not to be seen anywhere. But why is the staircase leading to the second floor bustling with the sound of stamping of shoes? I should go and see if everything is all right. I seem to be unaware."

Shamlal picked up his walking stick and went out of the room. While ascending the stairs he heard loud guffaws. Several men and women were gossiping and laughing while tea cups were ringing. He felt relieved at the thought that all was well and he need not worry. "But what is this hullabaloo about? This joyful atmosphere? What is the matter? Why am I unaware of all this? Since the departure of my wife I have not been able to keep track of what my children are doing. While she was alive they did not take any step without my knowledge, but now they don't consult me about anything. But how am I concerned? I too had my day; now it is their turn. The world goes on like that. There should be no scope for anger. No harm will come if I also go there and join the fun. I too can have a hearty laugh or two.

Even if they invite me to rock-and-roll dance I should not hesitate. Actually, man should change with the times..."

With these thoughts in his mind he went upstairs with the help of his stick and stood in front of the door from where the guffaws emanated. He surveyed the room from a distance. Men and women sitting around a large table were sipping tea and indulging in guffaws. Kuki was hosting them while Mohanji followed her. As soon as Shamlal reached the door, Mohanji saw him, swooped on him like a vulture and said: "Come on, I shall help you to go downstairs." Then he pushed him towards the staircase.

Shamlal was flabbergasted by Mohanji's behaviour. What could have happened to the latter, who was till now standing behind his wife and attending to the guests? How did he get this fit of epilepsy without any reason?... "Heavens would not fall if I too entered that room and gossiped with my family members for a while just as I used to do when my wife was alive..." Meanwhile, Mohanji pushed him halfway down the stairs, left him there and galloped back to the 'banquet hall'.

Meanwhile, another guffaw followed upstairs. One of the women guests asked Kuki: "Who was he?"

Kuki replied: "He is our servant. He looks after all household work. However, he has some problem."

"What's the matter with him?" asked the guest in a broken voice. Kuki replied incisively: "His brain is slightly deranged. He talks loosely."

The guest laughed and said: "He should have been allowed to come in. Such lunatics are good entertainers."

Shamlal heard all this and hopped down the remaining two steps. He repaired to his room and closed the door with a bang. With tears welling in his eyes, he sat on the cot. He involuntarily caught a glimpse of Sedha Lakshmi's life-size photograph kept in the room. On seeing it he felt as if a boulder had been placed on his heart. Copious tears gushed

out of his eyes for quite some time. He fully realised that he had lost something and he became intensely conscious of this hard fact of life. The appellation 'lunatic' used for him actually made him mad for a few seconds. He started talking to the walls, so to say. In the vain quest for his life-partner, he began rummaging the whole room as if he was trying to locate something in flesh and blood.

Finally, when nothing came his way, he caught hold of his wife's photograph and hugged it. Then he pressed it hard against his bosom, wept bitterly and again embraced it passionately. He now felt as if he had regained his lost 'treasure' which he had squandered by the roadside and which he discovered on his return trek. He once again hugged and kissed the photograph just as he used to make love to Sedha Lakshmi in his youth.

This very moment the door cracked open. He got a jolt and instantly looked towards the door. It was Kuki with the tea kettle. When she saw the old man's sad plight she felt bewildered and distressed as she ruminated: "This is how he is behaving at this late stage of his life. I shudder to imagine what will happen tomorrow when, on attaining his age, me or my spouse is left forlorn in this world like him!"

(*Courtesy*: *Kashmir Times*, Jammu.)

MIRROR WITHIN A MIRROR

By G.R. Santosh

Ghulam Rasool Santosh (b. 1929) is a front-rank short story writer of Kashmir. He has won several awards from the J&K Cultural Academy for his works in poetry, prose and drama. He bagged the Sahitya Akademi Award for his collection of verse, *Be'Sokh Ruh* (The Restless Soul), in 1979. He wrote songs for *Maan'zi Raat*, the first Kashmiri movie. Santosh is well known in art circles throughout the country and abroad. A prominent exponent of Tantric art, he won the Lalit Kala Academy Award thrice and got the Padmashri in 1977.

Today I was going to Nagdandi for the sixth time. Like every pilgrimage centre this place too has a spring which the Kashmiri Brahmins have always considered holy. Nearly three hundred years ago, a spiritually accomplished individual whom the devotees remember as Swamiji had got a temple built here. The structure of the temple is based on a *yantra*. Its roof, made of clay and birch bark, is divided into three parts. The ceiling is shaped like a hexagon star in the form of a lotus which has in its centre a large point (*bindu*). Right under this lotus is a cube-shaped pedestal the top of which is divided into four squares employing two vertical

and horizontal lines. The pedestal is situated above three stairs and is coated with vermilion. Innumerable red and yellow pieces of thread stick to it on all sides. For several generations the devotees have been believing that Swamiji will one day come and install an idol on this pedestal. Three hundred years ago, he had left saying that he was going to fetch the idol for this temple. However, when I first saw this pedestal, it never occurred to me that any idol could be installed on it.

Following age-old tradition, the faithful visited Nagdandi on the seventh lunar day in the month of Ashaad. The doorway of the temple was opened on this day for a recitation of Bhawani Sahastranam. The temple was then left open for two or three days more. It was a common belief that Swamiji was a saint belonging to the Sahib family. In deference to his wish the door was opened only by the daughter of the family. This practice holds good even today.

The fact is well known even now that all members of the Sahib family were adepts in the science of Tantra. All their customs and rituals were performed according to Tantra, with the male members participating. As Swamiji had prophesied, generation after generation one male and one female babies were born in the family. But the seventh generation, that of Sahib Kaul, was blessed with only a daughter. Since the age of twelve, she had been opening the door of the Nagdandi temple. I had got acquainted with Sahib Kaul three years ago through this very girl.

Before leaving for Nagdandi on the ninth lunar day of Ashaad, I used to spend the night of the eighth lunar day at their house. Sahib Kaul was not only sore about the birth of only a daughter in his family but also worried at the fact that she was running in the twenty-fourth year. According to the dynastic tradition, girls of the family were married off in the twelfth, sixteenth or twenty-fourth year. But this girl was not at all willing to get married. Sahib Kaul told me that immediately after entering the twelfth year his

daughter had got opened the large family *thakurdwara* (puja room) which had been shut down after the death of his grandfather. Normally, this room used to be opened only on the seventh lunar night of Ashaad.

When the girl first opened the door of the traditional *thakurdwara* she was confronted with a strange phenomenon which repeated itself later too. She would invariably find a snake coiled on the *aasan* (seat) on which her great-grandfather, Lala Sahib, used to sit for meditation. Since then she began to perform *puja* every morning, but only in the new *thakurdwara* of the family.

I had collected lot of information about the Sahib family from Sahib Kaul and his daughter. Sahib Kaul had often heard his father, Bab Lal, say that a human incarnation of Shakti would again take birth in their household. But he had not been able to clearly fathom the meaning of Bab Lal's prophecy. I once hinted to him that in the Kashmiri language the word 'kanya' meant both girl and 'shila' (stone).

Shila stands for Shailputri Devi (Shakti). At the shrine of Chakreshwar in Srinagar, the revelation of goddess Sharika is inscribed on a stone in the shape of Shri Yantra. The basis of Shri Chakra is Shatth Chakra, which consists of six triangles *shagun* of six attributes which is the Truth and the true revelation of the Sat Rishis. Bab Lal was a saintly person and his prophecy had come true. Sahib Kaul may or may not have understood my hint but his daughter had known it instinctively at the age of twelve. According to Sahib Kaul, she had studied all ancient, leftover Tantra texts. It was obvious that she did not make a show of her spiritual knowledge. Both from her appearance and talk she looked like an average girl but I had reognised her divine grandeur from the aura of her face and the sparkle in her eyes.

Sahib Kaul made some disclosures about the mysterious lives of his father and grandfather. He related to me an incident which he had not revealed to anyone before. His

father had told him that Lala Sahib was undoubtedly an accomplished saint but this fact was hidden from the common folks. On rare occasions he used to hold a conclave in his *thakurdwara* with a select gathering of *sadhus*, saints and Sufis. Even though he had inherited a *jagir* from his ancestors, he had transferred the responsibility of its management to his brother. He would set aside one-third of the yearly income for an invocatory *Chandi Path* at the shrine of Maha Kali on the Hari Parbat Hill and also for meeting the expenses of the all-important daughter of the family. The remaining amount was distributed among the poor and indigent people.

Bab Lal had related to Sahib Kaul one of his rare experiences. On a wintry night he felt the need to go to the toilet downstairs. His mother used to sleep on the ground floor in a room facing the kitchen. He heard a strange sound emanating from that room. He flung open the bedroom door and lit a lamp, only to find his mother lying down on the floor. Her mouth was half-open and froth was coming out of it together with the sound as that of a blower. Her right arm was alternately going up and falling down. On seeing his mother's condition, he became anxious. He rushed upstairs and woke up his uncle who diagnosed the old woman's problem as a stroke. It was essential to convey the news to Lala Sahib but the difficulty was that at this odd hour he was usually busy meditating in the *thakurdwara*. Nobody had ever dared to interrupt the *sadhana* of Lala Sahib. Bab Lal hesitated umpteen times to throw open the door of the *thakurdwara* but ultimately he was forced to do so.

What he saw through the open door was enough to chill his marrow. He lost his wits. Lala Sahib was floating, as if in space, and his tongue was protruding out of the mouth. After a while, when Bab Lal came to his own, he heard his father addressing him thus: "Arrange for my funeral also along with that of your mother." Then Lala Sahib went into a *samadhi*. At that very moment Bab Lal's mother also

breathed her last in the bedroom below.

Whenever Bab Lal recollected this incident he tended to blame himself for the death of Lala Sahib because it was he who had intercepted the latter's meditation. Whatever he had achieved spiritually as Lala Sahib's disciple he utilised for the service of the people. That was why he was popularly called Karmayogi. After the passing of Lala Sahib, when he discovered a serpent coiled on the seat of his father he stopped going into the *thakurdwara* and set up a new *puja* room in another house.

While I was staying with the Sahib family I felt like spending the night in their traditional *thakurdwara* with full knowledge that a snake sat there on the seat of Lala Sahib. The truth was that I normally shuddered at the very mention of a snake by anyone. Sahib Kaul's daughter ostensibly read my mind and made arrangement for my rest in that room. As she unlocked the door, her father hesitatingly opened it. Immediately after stepping inside he leapt back. The snake was sitting coiled up on the *aasan*. The girl put the earthen lamp in the hollow shelf of the wall and then bowed before the serpent with folded hands. The snake crawled away from the seat and disappeared. Sahib Kaul looked at me in a manner suggesting that it would be dangerous to stay in that room overnight. Without staring back at him I went forward and put my bag on one side of the *aasan*. The girl fetched a sheet and a pillow for my use. Then Sahib Kaul, with his head bent down, followed his daughter out of the room and I bolted the door from inside.

The moment I sat on the *aasan* my eyes began to close automatically and I became unconscious. Whether I was sitting or lying down, waking or sleeping I could not decide even after getting up in the morning. About what I 'saw' while in that stupor, I could not reach any ultimate conclusion — whether it was a dream or some exquisite vision!

I 'saw' as if I was flying in the sky. There was neither

brightness like that of the day nor darkness as that of the night. A sort of dim moonlight pervaded all available space. Right under my eyes I could see a hillock. I descended from the high heaven and began to hover around the hill. I felt that the shape of the hili resembled that of a coiled serpent. Countless fountain-heads of colourful light were sprouting from all sides. It appeared to me as if the whole hillock was studded with pearls and emeralds. Sometimes I could see myriad eyes blinking in every place. Then, suddenly, I found myself perched on the top of the hill. Right in front of me was a huge *Sheshnag*, carved out of a rock, sitting upright with its hood unfolded. Below the hood stood a man-shaped figure in *padmasan* pose. While actually it constituted the pinnacle of the hill, I could feel that the human figure was no larger than the normal size of a man. I tried my level best to see the 'face' of this figure but could not succeed in locating it. Suddenly, there was a bang like that of lightning and I could feel that the same had emanated from that very 'face'. Thereafter, I regained consciousness.

For a long while after I woke up, the panorama seen during the dream continued to hover before my eyes. I could recollect that when I had sat on the *aasan* my eyes had closed of their own, and when I woke up the next morning I was still sitting on the seat. Did I go to sleep? Did I have a dream? I put these questions to myself but could not get a definite answer. However, I understood one fact that wakefulness, dream or deep-sleep state are the three constituents of reality which, after merging into the state of *thuria* and waking the conscience, make one realise the universal consciousness that is free from the shackles of time and clime.

At some distance I could hear the crowing of a cock. I took out the towel from my bag and went downstairs to have a wash. Then I returned to the room and sat on the *aasan*. In a jiffy, my body began to twist like a coiled serpent and it appeared as if someone was trying to pull me upwards. I

remained in the same state for quite some time with my eyes shut. When ultimately I got extricated from this unenviable condition, I opened my eyes only to find that the snake which I had seen in the room the previous night was crawling into my bag. Instead of my getting a fright, the realisation dawned in my mind that the whole process of my spending the night in this room, having a dream and then the serpent getting into my bag was governed by some unknown power. I folded the towel, put it over the snake and then closed the mouth of the bag.

I left the house after having breakfast. *En route*, I could not realise how I traversed the distance up to Nagdandi. Perhaps I was delving deep into my own self, or, may be, I appeared to be thoughtful while actually I was not brooding over anything. Whatever happened during the journey, I did not remember anything about it.

Like all previous occasions there was a huge congregation at Nagdandi. Hundreds of devotees and believers were eagerly waiting for the sunset when *aarti* would be performed and Bhawani Sahastranam recited. The sun was about to set. I walked up to the spring situated behind the temple and then climbed a little distance into the forest to the spot where a tiny waterfall descending from the centre of a rock disappeared into a crevice below only to sprout again as a fountain from inside the spring. I washed my hands and face and lay down in a relaxed mood. Perhaps I even slept for a while. I woke up when the sun had set already. Instantly I remembered the snake in my bag, about whom I had forgotten altogether. I untied the bag, removed the towel and stepped aside. The serpent came out and started crawling towards the back of the rock. It stopped on the last edge of the rock, lay in a coil, stood upright with its hood unfolded and looked at me for a few seconds. Thereafter, it disappeared behind the rock.

Just then I heard the devotees and believers shouting slogans like "Swamiji is immortal!" I hurried back to the

temple and saw a very old Brahmin with grey hair and beard and wearing a Kashmiri-style turban entering the temple premises. Sahib Kaul and his daughter were among those who followed him. The Swami stopped at the door of the temple. He whispered something into the ear of the girl and then went inside. Sahib Kaul's daughter informed the devotees that according to the wish of Swamiji the temple door would remain closed for three hours. Deep prognostic silence enveloped the whole place. All the people sat down and waited with bated breath for the door of the temple to reopen.

All the people assembled there firmly believed that Swamiji was the same pious man who had got the temple at Nagdandi built three hundred years ago. Late in the night when the temple door opened, Swamiji was seen performing *aarti* with his back to the entrance. Immediately the whole atmosphere outside reverberated with the strains of Bhawani Sahastranam. Each and every devotee, with his eyes closed, was lost in himself and tossed his body with joy while reciting the Sahastranam. When the recitation ended, all the believers entered the temple one by one or in pairs to have a glimpse of the deity. While at the time of going inside their eyes were filled with doubts and fears, on their exit from the temple the very same eyes reflected a mixed feeling of reverence and astonishment. Everyone had a vermilion mark on the forehead and everyone carried a handful of *prasad*.

My turn to enter the temple came in the early hours of the morning. Once inside, the first thing I caught sight of was the pedestal. All the red and yellow pieces of thread around it had been removed and a clean mirror installed in their place. On the right I could see Swamiji sitting in *padmasan* pose. He gave me a smile. On my left, I saw Sahib Kaul's daughter deep in meditation with her eyes closed. I looked into the mirror but could not find my reflection anywhere. What was reflected, however, was the same

human figure in *padmasan* pose whom I had seen in my dream sitting under the hood of the Sheshnag on the hill-top. His face was not a face, but only a mirror.

(*Courtesy*: *Kashmir Times*, Jammu.)

ESSAY

MIRROR

By Mohd. Zaman Azurdah

Dr Mohd. Zaman Azurdah (b. 1945), noted essay writer, has won the Sahitya Akademi Award for his pioneering book of essays in Kashmiri. He teaches in Kashmir University and his work is marked by free flow of expression, sharp wit and tearing satire. He has to his credit seven collections of essays and short stories in Kashmiri and Urdu.

The beloved is not free
from adorning herself;
the veil on her face comes
between her and the mirror.

In this couplet Poet Ghalib eulogises someone's embellishing art, but that is a different matter. Man by nature always looks into this very framed mirror. Sometimes we mistake a mirror to be only the looking-glass in which a man sees his face. That is not a fact. Man can see his reflected image even in walls or in the air provided his eyes are wide open. But if he is so lethargic as to keep his eyes shut, he thinks all is well with him; only others notice his drawbacks.

One delectable thing about the mirror is that it consoles everybody. If a man ever realises that his face is not handsome he will never fix his gaze at the mirror, but that

contingency does not arise as the mirror rarely breaks anyone's heart.

In this world there are many such people who hold a mirror to others. The officer, on reaching his place of work in the morning, makes his subordinates see their belittled personalities by scolding them so much that they eat the humble pie and dare not utter a single word. They cannot muster courage enough to tell him that what he is doing is not right. They are helpless because the officer's mirror of estimation never reflects the full image of a subordinate. You must have seen mirrors which project a man as short-statured, hunchbacked or curved. The onlooker gets the fright of his life on seeing himself in such a mirror. This is exactly what happens to the subordinate on seeing his officer. It is said that the mirror is not partial; it may spare the heart but does not show favour to anyone. That is why poet Nizami said:

> Brave souls do not flatter kings:
> the mirror does not hide Alexander's faults.

The mirror does not care whether any particular time or place is opportune. The officer also acts in a like manner. Similarly, the mirror does not have regard for the fact that not long ago a particular man was in the prime of his youth and beauty and at that time it had itself felt small on seeing his mirrorlike face. Now it turns its face away from him and ruthlessly exposes the wrinkles on his forehead. The officer too acts like a similar mirror for his subordinates. He weighs the whole world in his own pair of scales. Again, this mirror never remains in one position. It changes from inside. It encloses many mirrors within itself and no one can guess which particular mirror will be in the front or at the back at any given time.

Nature has fashioned the mirror in a funny way. Just like the heart, it reciprocates exactly in the manner in which one looks at it. It wants to remain neat and clean. Once

dust settles on it, everything inside looks hazy. Unless the dirt disappears from its face, even the sun appears to it as misty, leave alone other objects. That is why we cannot say with certainty that the mirror is always truthful. Sometimes, due to its own curvature or dirt, all appear to it as angular or unclean.

If you happen to watch the reflection of a tree in water, you will see that the poor tree, which happily stands erect otherwise, appears to be curved in this mirror. And, it even turns upside down. The fact, however, remains that the tree is neither curved nor does it suffer from any other defect. But what can one say? When such a mirror confronts a man, it leads him astray at every step.

The affluent dignitary is also like a mirror. The poor common man looks at this very mirror wistfully all his life. But this mirror has its own cracks, twists, lines and wrinkles. The poor man, being also simple-minded, rubs his eyes in the hope of getting a clear view. But he fails to understand that by doing this he cannot remove the wrinkles on the surface of the mirror. He cleanses his face with the washing soap, but how can that process help in wiping the dirt from the mirror? Then, since this dirt is not settled on the exterior of the mirror he cannot clean it even with soap. The malady is deep-rooted in the body of the mirror. When man tries to remove its outer layers, smoke emanates from it just as it oozes from an onion when it is peeled off. The pungent smell of the onion only affects the eyes but the smoke rising from the mirror pierces the heart. Therefore, the best way to save oneself from such after-effects is to shun this mirror altogether.

Ignorance rules the roost nowadays; it can achieve whatever it desires. It is guided by its own light. It drives knowledge from pillar to post. The old-time saying that "A crooked person cannot harm the simple-hearted man" is no longer valid. Now the simple-minded man has to carry out

the dictates of the crook in both letter and spirit. He has no other choice.

Knowledge is straight, with a well-defined path. A diligent and dashing student is bound to reach his destination one day. On the contrary, ignorance is full of twists and turns. It does not follow a straight course. Its path is so zigzag that occasionally it is lost and then found again. This pathway cuts at every step into the road of knowledge and simplicity, thus harassing scholars and straightforward people. The irony is that generally the poor scholars are obliged to gaze at the ignorant with wide-eyed wonder. They see their fate reflected in this very mirror of ignorance. Their own scholarship and simplemindedness are of no avail.

They, of course, feel very confident while contemplating in the libraries and enter the employment market with great eagerness. But when they are confronted by the mirror of ignorance, they feel flabbergasted on realising how weak, famished and inert they are. They are unable to accept the meagre terms offered to them. They feel hungry but are pained to find that the ignorant have already grabbed all the loaves. At last they become helpless and, despite all their worth, follow in the footsteps of the ignorant. They try hard to discard the burden of their scholarship in disgust but do not succeed because knowledge has struck its roots deep into their vitals.

Conscience is the real mirror of a man. You may lull it to sleep but it must open its eye sometime or the other. On some occasion this eye also blinks. In his helplessness man may shut his eyes and bury his conscience under a thick blanket, but it goes on pricking him. In the internal mirror of his conscience, man sees himself in various colours. Sometimes he hides his face with his hands or tosses his head against the wall but then the mirrors of the outer world beckon him to pastures new.

I remember the day long ago when on entering my room I found a photograph which perturbed me. I failed to understand how it had found a place in my room. It was the photograph of a man who had always borne enmity with me, who ravaged me, who pierced my heart with taunts every morn and eve and who never hesitated to stab me in the back. I got engulfed by the flames of hatred, my whole body shivered with rage and I angrily called the servant. As he came I asked him in a loud voice as to who had kept the photograph in my room. He looked sideways and then enquired, "Which photograph are you referring to, sir? There is no photograph here." I shouted at him in a louder tone, "Why are you looking that side? Look at the table."

The servant smiled involuntarily and said in a subdued voice, "Sir, that is only a mirror." I felt small and could not muster courage enough to look into that mirror again. I put it upside down on the table and walked out.

(*Courtesy*: *Thorns and Thistles*.)

I remember the day long ago [illegible]

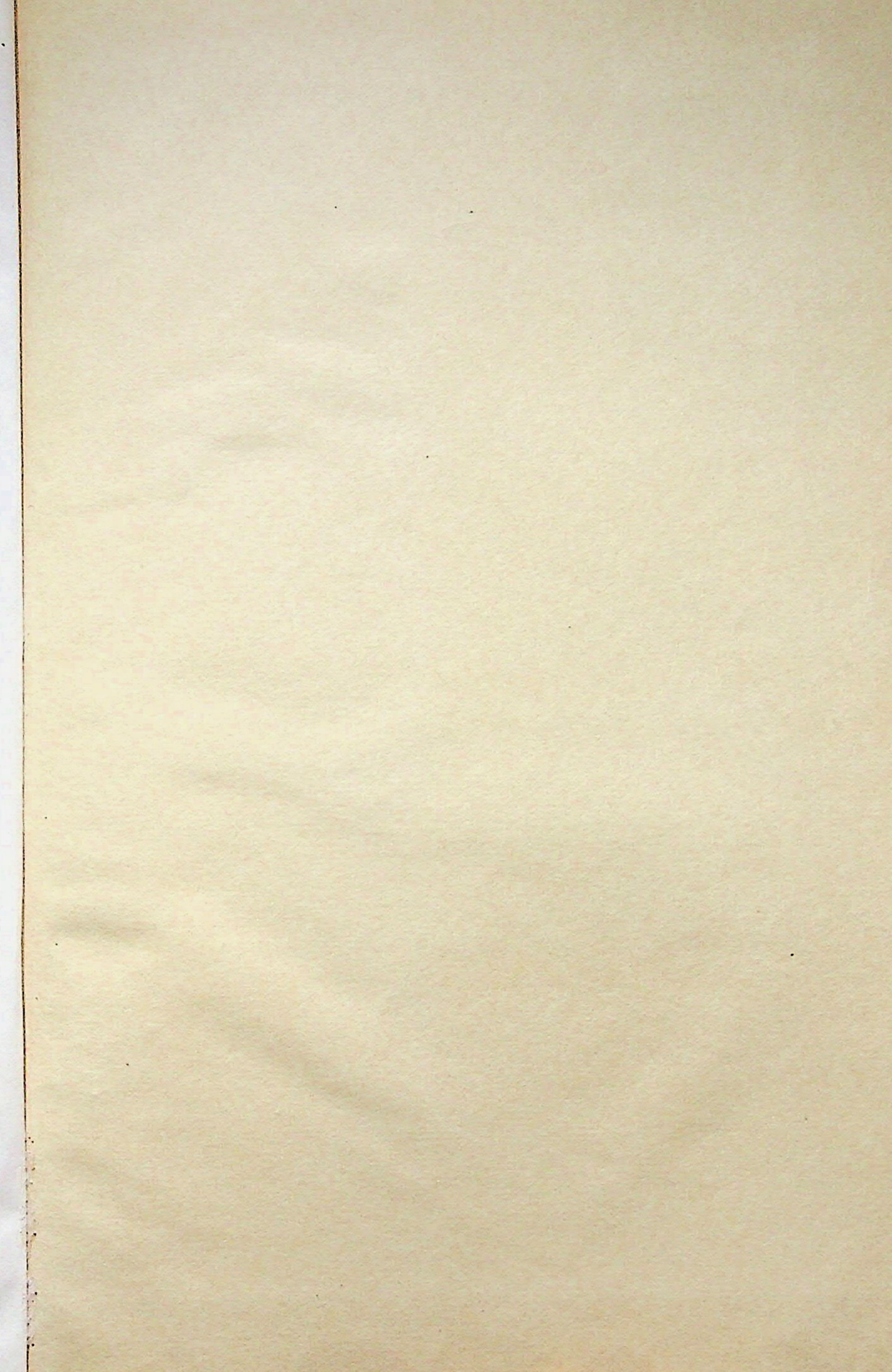
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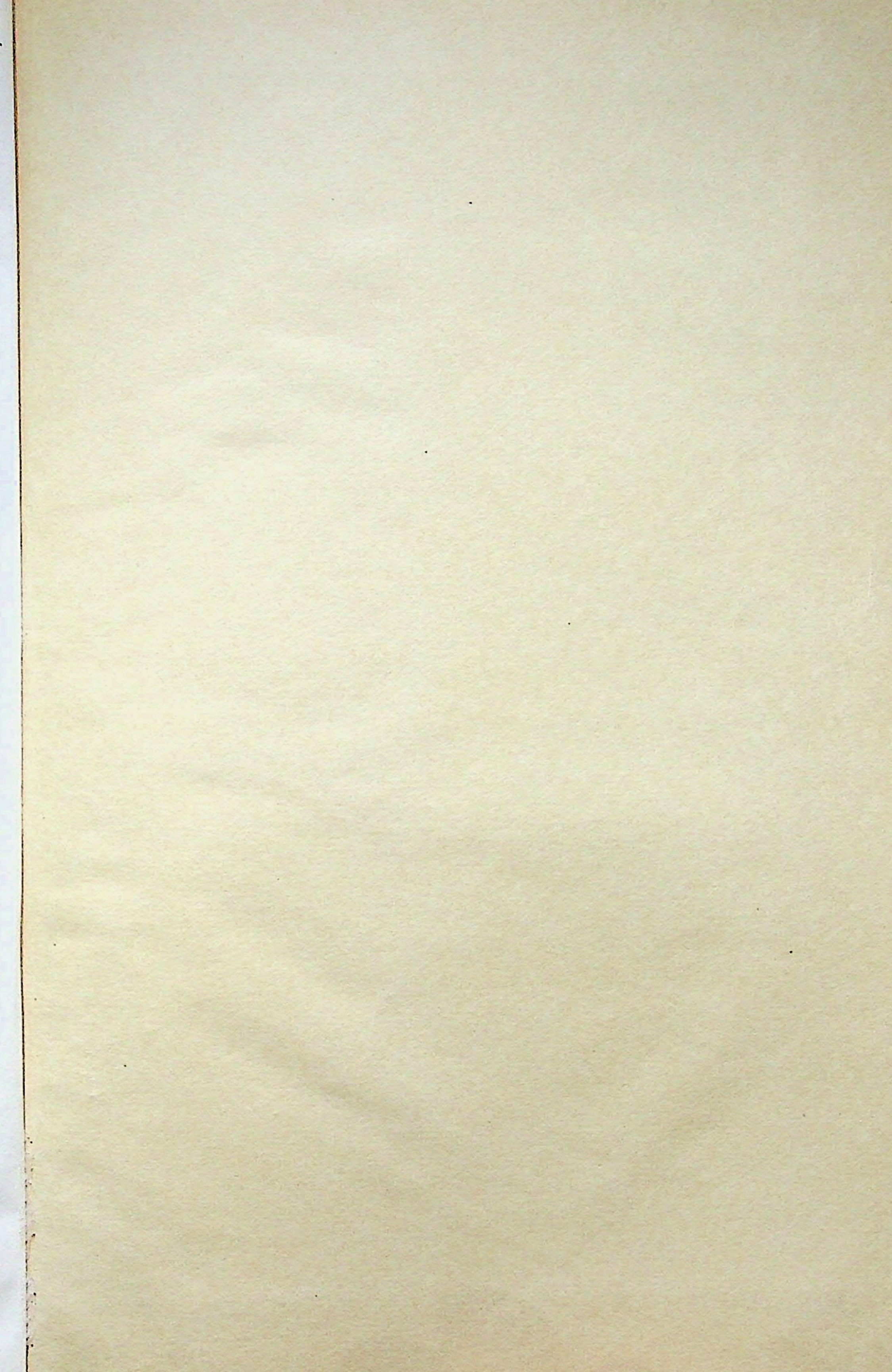
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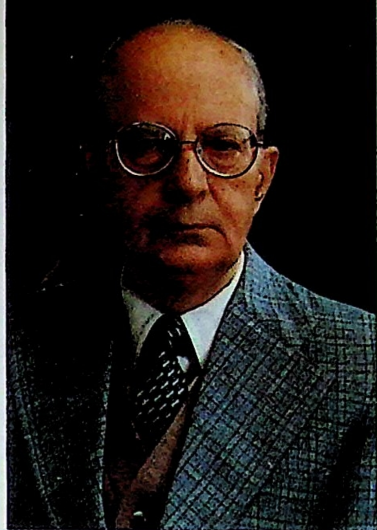
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T.N. Kaul, M.A. (Econ.) was born on November 23, 1922 in Srinagar. After completing an innings of thirty-four years in *The Hindustan Times, The Tribune* and *The Times of India*, he retired as Chief Sub-Editor in 1982. Before joining journalism he did a stint in teaching, having worked as Senior English and G.K. Teacher in D.A.V. High School, Quetta, Baluchistan.The Partition drove him to Delhi as a displaced person. He has written articles in several English dailies and literary journals and published a large number of poems, short stories and essays from Kashmiri language in English translation. His has been four decades of labour of love in the cause of his mother tongue.



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